Research Support Services: Religious Studies

Vanderbilt Divinity Library
Jean and Alexander Heard Library
Vanderbilt University

Project Team: Michael Kohut, Chris Benda, Ramona Romero, Bill Hook
8-30-2016

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Overview of Methodology used in this Study

The methodology and specific interview questions used in the following study were developed by Ithaka S+R. As described in its project proposal, the goal of the Religious Studies Support Services project was:

> "to understand the resources and services these faculty members need to be successful in their teaching and research. This information will be used to articulate the research needs of religious studies scholars including identifying improvements to pre-existing research support services and opportunities for developing new research support services."

The Divinity Library at Vanderbilt University is one nineteen religious/theological libraries participating in the national study conducted semi-structured interviews with members of their own local faculty. The following report is based on an analysis of these responses. All interviews and analyses were completed by the authors of this report.

We sought to pursue the goals of the larger project, with a specific emphasis on religious studies scholarship and needs. In pursuit of that goal, our team identified fifteen faculty members at Vanderbilt University whose primary research concerns religion (defining "religion" as broadly as possible to include both religious studies and theological studies). These faculty members were drawn from the Divinity School and the College of Arts & Science (A&S). Most are faculty in the Graduate Department of Religion. Seeking to ensure that a range of views would be represented, our selection criteria for potential participants sought to ensure equal numbers of junior and senior scholars (based on tenure status) and faculty from Divinity and A&S.

In mid-January, potential participants were invited via email to take part in an anonymous and uncompensated interview that was estimated to take from thirty minutes to an hour. Each of the three interviewers personally emailed five of the potential participants. Unanswered solicitations were followed-up one week later by another email. When participants agreed to take part in the research, they were asked to choose a date, time and location for the interview. Interviewers emphasized flexibility in their schedules for the convenience of participating faculty. All interviews took place in the office of the participating faculty member.

Ambiguity over whether specific faculty members were going to participate slowed down the process, since interviewers were reluctant to email more faculty members until it was certain that invited faculty were unwilling to participate. No invitees explicitly declined participation, although six of the originally selected faculty members simply did not reply to our requests. In at least two cases, faculty stopped responding to emails *after* initially agreeing to participate, and in one case after actually scheduling an interview but then not appearing at the location at the meeting time. In some cases, when faculty members failed to respond, they were successfully encouraged to do so by Dean Bill Hook, who knew them personally.

The three primary authors — Ramona Romero, Christopher Benda and Michael Kohut — each interviewed an average of five scholars of religion during February and March. We were instructed by Ithaka S+R not to skip questions or ask them out of order, though follow-up questions and some rephrasing were permitted. The basic interview script comprised fifteen questions, which asked

participants about the focus of their research, their process of conducting research, publication practices, and broader trends in their respective fields. All questions were open-ended, and participants were encouraged to expand on and qualify their answers as they wished.

All interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed off-site by a company called Transcription Divas, which was recommended by the principal investigator at Ithaka S+R. Transcriptions were qualitatively analyzed by the authors using Dedoose, cloud-based qualitative analysis software. After one round of coding nearly half (7 of the 15 interviewees) of the transcripts, our research team chose the most salient themes and issues, and then developed a set of codes that would be used for final analysis. During the month of April, all transcripts were coded according to that system, and it is upon these codes that the analysis presented in this report is based.

It is our hope that the following final research report on research practices and common needs among scholars of religion will be useful for improving research support services for faculty working on topics related to religion.

I. Limitations to Methods

The goal of this research is to better understand the research practices of scholars working on topics related to religion and to identify ways in which research support services may be improved for scholars in this field. With that goal in mind, there were several limitations to the methods employed. A brief account of each of these limitations is provided below, followed by implications for the results of the study.

1. The sheer diversity of scholarship makes representation difficult.

Scholars of religion at Vanderbilt are dispersed across multiple departments and schools. The majority are shared between the Divinity School and the College of Arts & Science. Needless to say, all faculty connected with the Divinity School work on religion to some extent, specifically in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Within the College of Arts & Science, faculty members working on religion are concentrated in the Department of Religious Studies, but can also be found in the History Department and the Asian Studies Program. This latter group of scholars works almost entirely within other religious traditions, specifically Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism.

There are two graduate programs at Vanderbilt that award advanced degrees in religion. The first program is housed in the Divinity School, which offers professional degrees in Master of Divinity and Master of Theological Studies. The Vanderbilt Divinity School is interdenominational, with nevertheless a focus on the Judeo-Christian traditions. It includes, but is not limited to, training for ordination for Christian ministry. A separate graduate program, known as the Graduate Department of Religion, exists as a division of the Graduate School. It offers an M.A. and Ph.D. in Religion. Fields of Study in the GDR include Ethics and Society; Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel; Historical Studies; History and Critical Theories of Religion (HACTOR)[1]; Homiletics and Liturgics; New Testament and Early Christianity; Religion,

[1] At the time of the interviews this program was still referred to as HACTOR. Beginning with the fall 2016 semester the program name was changed to Critical Studies in Asian, Islamic and Jewish Traditions. For the purposes of this report we will continue to reference it in the text as HACTOR.

Psychology and Culture; and Theological Studies. Courses offered in the Graduate Department of Religion are taught by faculty in the Divinity School, the College of Arts & Science, the Law School and the Medical School, though the majority of these faculty are affiliated with the first two schools, as noted above.

We limited our sample to faculty in the GDR program who belonged to either the Divinity School or College of Arts & Science. Initially, we identified fifty seven scholars in those two schools whose work directly concerns religion. These scholars belong to various departments and "fields of study." They range from adjuncts and visiting scholars to emeritus professors. They work in a wide variety of religious traditions. As will be explained in the next section, even within a single field of study, topics and methods among scholars differ substantially, to the point that many of our participants told us that they cannot relate to most of their own colleagues regarding the work they do.

While we tried to select fifteen scholars who would be most representative of this diversity, the task itself was deeply challenging, requiring trade-offs between breadth and depth. In the end, we focused our attention on faculty in HACTOR (6), which is a fairly broad area of study that tends to include most Arts & Science faculty that work on religion, and overlaps substantially with the Religious Studies Department. Other participants were in Historical Studies (3), Theological Studies (2), Religion, Psychology and Culture (2), with Hebrew Bible and New Testament represented by only one scholar each. We were not able to obtain interviews with any scholars in Ethics and Society or Homiletics and Liturgics. In short, the views expressed in this report should not be considered exhaustive or fully representative of faculty at Vanderbilt who work on religion.

2. Many of the participants were uncomfortable with certain terms and questions in the interview, particularly "data," "methods," and "theory."

The interview script was developed by Ithaka S+R in consultation with scholars of religion. Nevertheless, many of the faculty participants in the study had issues with several of the interview questions, especially those related to research. Responses to the following question—"Does your research produce data?"—were somewhat ambivalent, owing to uncertainty over the meaning of "data" and its applicability to what they do:

> "If data is perceived as new knowledge, I would hope so. Yeah. If data is perceived as something that you can easily disseminate, you can put it up in graphs, then I would say no. I'm not really interested in that kind of data, but I am interested in new arguments being created, that might impact the way we think about graphs or even what kind of graph should we go after and try to figure out. So I would say, depending on how data is understood, probably yes or no."

> "That's a good question. That comes so much out of the science things. It produces knowledge. And whether that would be described as data – that's such a good question because, you know, sciences like to make a distinction between theories and data, but it's fuzzier in the theological studies and I think religious studies. So I just don't know. I don't know. I have to think about that."

> "Yes. A more important question is what on earth is data? But I've been inclined increasingly to think that this sort of data versus interpretation view of information

> that we can get from the sciences is useful to a degree. In this case, I would view this as data."
>
> "That's an interesting question. It depends upon what you mean by data. […] If data means raw material, no. I'm not an archeologist; I don't dig stuff up. I don't go hunting for manuscripts. I don't go looking for text-critical concerns and translate this in a new way. I'll play with it, but it's not what I see my agenda to be. So in that sense, no. I don't think I'm generating data. I do think that I'm generating new ways of seeing the data that are already there. So that's more of a second order thing."

For many of the participants, "data" had such clear associations with the social sciences that they adamantly rejected the idea of producing data through their own research.

> "But not data like quantitative sense, right? So not data in terms of the social sciences. If work in the humanities can produce data, I don't know. Perhaps archival data, broadly construed qualitative data, right? So I mean, like, one of the broadly construed because qualitative research methodologies aren't a part of what we do."
>
> "It doesn't produce anything like that. That's not for me, or anything that I think about. I can see all kinds of wonderful things coming out of cataloging or things like going into archives and looking in the British Archives or the British Library looking at the India Office Archives for statistical information or that kind of thing, like publication -- how many books were published in Bengali in 1872? That kind of stuff. I run across that kind of material, but it's not the kind of material I'd really use, and I certainly don't produce it."
>
> "I don't think so. No, I don't think I collect anything that's ... to be collected in that sort of way and sort of compiled. No."
>
> "Sure, obviously my research does not intentionally produce scientific data. It does not produce data that can then be taken up, or pursued, or reconfirmed by other researchers. I don't think data is really the right term."
>
> "Well, if they mean it in a very broad context, then I guess yes. If they mean it in as what a social scientist would produce, or what a biologist would produce, no. Absolutely not. In the context of what I produce, "data" is a weird word to describe [it]."

Other scholars were willing to use the term "data," but only after tweaking the idea of data to varying extents, often with the encouragement of the interviewers:

> "I guess what I would rather say about it is that it produces, if you want to consider this data, I think it produces, I hope, real genuine insights into what is going on in our world, and theology's role in it, and religion's role in it, with a goal towards shaping not just how people who encounter the work think about that, but what they do and what they might do in response to it. So I guess that's how I would describe what I do."

> "Yes, 'data' in the sense that, say I'm looking at texts that haven't been translated before, or were never remarked on in any Western language publication. If you want to think of a translated work as data, then the answer is yes. I mean, maybe if we have a definition of data, you know, it may not qualify but I guess it all hinges on what is data."
>
> "Yes, in that regard, it's data. Is it data that one could compound a database? I'm not sure. I'm not sure. Maybe somebody could, you know, tag you with markers and classify [the news]. You know, I'm not sure if it's that kind of data. I think if I get that kind of data—working with ancient archives and classifying the data in these archives for the research—then, yeah."
>
> "Yeah, I would -- yes it does -- it certainly does produce data. I have been shocked at how much data it produces. That is the visual culture materiality approach. Things that were scattered and meaningless are woven together into these new patterns. You see these continuities. They're not -- the point is that they're not necessarily theological continuities. They're not necessarily woven together, attached together, through conceptual doctrinal models. They are placed within a network, within real networks of religious practice and religious embodiment and visual field and visual culture. So, you start to see new webs, let's say, of meaning form if you get onto the wavelength, onto some of these wavelengths."
>
> "At the same time, there's interpretation built into that. Like what I just described to you is an interpretation. So you have data built through interpretation. And sometimes definitely it's the case that in humanities "data" you have to allow things to be much fuzzier than in the hard sciences. Though probably compared to social sciences, the difference is not that huge. But also at the end to the day to realize, okay there's going to be a fuzzy grey area of what is data and what is interpretation. You can't quite force it; but it's still worthwhile. I think some people have resisted the idea of, "Well humanities doesn't have data." I don't think the people who made this three volume manuscript catalog would agree with that. They had a naïve view of that they are objectively exhaustively describing each manuscript. So it is data."

Many scholars of religion do see a role for data, even in the humanities, and they employ database management tools in order to organize, store and use that data. We will discuss this further in Section IV.

There was also confusion over the terms "methods" and "theory." As with "data," these terms were difficult for many scholars of religion to apply to their own work.

> Interviewer: What theoretical approaches do you use?
>
> Respondent: In what sense?
>
> Interviewer: I don't know -- do you see yourself as drawing on any particular theoretical tradition or theorists?

Respondent: Hm. That's a really hard question. I don't know if I could answer that specifically.

Interviewer: When I ask what theory do you draw on, what does that make you think of? What does theory mean to you?

Respondent: Okay. That's a better question.

Interviewer: This next set of questions regards your research methods. The first one, what theoretical approaches does your research utilize or rely on?

Respondent: Well this would be probably an elaboration on what I said, because my research is not primarily empirical. It doesn't really depend on … It does not use much from the natural or social sciences, but works with ideas, arguments, claims, things like that and philosophical theories. I would say that my method … How did you put the question again?

Interviewer: I can certainly repeat the question. What theoretical approaches does your research utilize or rely on?

Respondent: Yeah … I don't know that I have, I don't know that my approach to my research sufficiently follow a particular theoretical model that would be recognized. It's not a method so I don't know. Some people could say a lot of the theological work I do really is ethnographical in nature. I don't really have anything that I can say because I don't follow a scientific or social scientific model in doing my research. It's really much more akin to what a philosopher would do.

Interviewer: What theoretical approaches does your research rely on?

Respondent: Theoretical approaches. What does that mean?

Interviewer: It's hard for me to say. If I thought of something like literary studies, I would think about deconstruction or something like that.

Respondent: Oh that's what you mean. Okay.

Interviewer: I guess maybe in religious studies, Durkheimian or whatever.

Respondent: Yeah, gotcha. Really let's see. I'm sure I rely on something. Nothing comes to mind. Let me think really hard about my work. Theoretical approaches. I mean, I think if I'm going to locate it, I guess some would say kind of a ... I don't know if people would consider this a theoretical approach but… [names an anthropologist]… It's more a methodology but he did propose a theory behind it. […] So yeah, that's the only one I can think of. I'm not a poststructuralist or anything like that. At least I don't claim to be.

Complicating participants' efforts to answer these questions was a tendency to use the terms "method" and "theory" interchangeably:

> "I don't know because I take those theoretical frameworks and turn them into methodology of sorts. I think I'll answer that second question [about methodology] almost exactly the same as the first [about theory], except that the second one, the methodology's more practical - that's how you do it. I mean, you read stuff and you try to see what's going to happen between me and what I'm reading. So, yeah, sorry. I cannot give –"
>
> "Sure. Again I think that the way I … my theoretical approach to the topic is pretty much a restatement of my research methods."
>
> "So yeah, a historian's inclination to use theory, but to use it pragmatically and heuristically. In terms of particular areas, ritual studies, ritual theory, has been something useful in my work. Methodologies, also philology, comparative philology, I would view as a methodology. Postcolonial approaches to interpretation have been useful in some of my recent work, but that's because I'm working on the Middle East. I don't know if one would call it a methodology, but also the emerging methods of digital humanities are pretty important to my work. "
>
> Interviewer: What theoretical approaches do you see yourself in?
>
> Respondent: I don't think people should be restricted to a particular method. I find that remarkably tedious. Moreover, I'm old. And the methods that were in play when I was an undergraduate, people would laugh at the idea of structuralism. So I refuse to be wedded to any particular method, and I tend to read as widely as possible.
>
> Interviewer: Do you see a distinction between theory and method?
>
> Respondent: People use 'theory,' they use 'approach,' they use 'method.' If they want to be fancy, they use 'methodology.' I find the general use of those terms to be more or less synonymous, depending upon the people in your little play area, you might want to use one term rather than the other. I don't find it ultimately helpful. I'm very much antagonistic toward jargon, and I don't like any form of academic obfuscation.

However, if we limited our analysis to the observation that these scholars conflate methodology and theory, or that they struggle over the concept of data, then we may have been tempted to say that they are simply confused, or that they lack rigor in their work. Such a conclusion would be as unhelpful as it is mistaken. Since the structure of these questions tends to obfuscate rather than elucidate, we focused our analytical attention on the language and descriptions scholars gave of their research process instead.

Ultimately, responses to these questions about data, theory and method do help to establish something about how these scholars work and see what they do. First, they are generally critical of social science

approaches, or at least reject them in their own work. Second, while they may eschew the term "data," the participants certainly see themselves as transforming something into something else. Typically, they begin with texts, which they transform, interpret and add to new understandings, insights and information. Nevertheless, in the majority of cases, it makes little sense to speak of data, either as the object of analysis or as its product. Likewise, most of the scholars who participated in this project absolutely use ideas and frameworks developed by other scholars, which could be considered "theoretical approaches," but because the nature of their work is very different from the social sciences, it may be more misleading than helpful to talk about them as theory or to insist on strict differentiation from methods.

3. **Participants were very much aware of the connections between the study and the library, which may have biased their responses.**

Though the research design of this project attempted to promote full disclosure by promising participants anonymity, participants may have been self-censoring due to the twin facts that (i) the interviewers in most cases were themselves librarians and (ii) the project was being conducted through the library.

First, aware that library personnel would inevitably be reading their responses (or may be hearing them first-hand), participants were reluctant to say anything critical of the library, often qualifying apparent critiques through overt praise for the library and its staff.

> "I have really high opinion of previous work that Ithaka S+R has done and so I'm thrilled that we're partnering with them and just thrilled with this project all around. I'm also aware of the fact that the library staff are the leads on the project are just to speak objectively, my favorite people in the library. And I'm pretty aware that my own research habits are sufficiently unique that it will be difficult to anonymize my responses. So one, to just state for analysis purposes, that there might be a slight tension in the way I'm answering the questions, but I'm happy to give my best in constructive feedback. At the same time, I'm delighted with the current level of services I get in the library. So this is all forward-looking and not negative."

> "You know, no. I, again, want to iterate that I think the library staff has been phenomenal tool to me, really have been really good and I'm very grateful. I would not be able to do the kind of stuff that I do without the help I got, so I'm very grateful for that."

Second, participants sometimes communicated that they were trying to limit their responses to information they considered to be most relevant to the library.

> "Well, I don't think there's anything else that I can really add. I mean if there's - it's not library oriented, it's more institutional oriented because we've diminished the intake of graduate students, cut them in half. I mean, my fourth year here, I've never had a grad student working for me as, like a research assistant, which means all the research I do. There is no help."

> Interviewer: Is there anything else about your research that you feel that I should ask about?

> Respondent: I have no clue, because I'm still thinking about how any of this is relevant to the library.
>
> "The stuff that I work on -- part of the problem, and this interview may not help you guys that much … what I work on, nobody else works on."

These particular limitations, like those noted above, do not necessarily undermine the overall findings of the project. The reader ought simply to be aware that they exist and that we took them into account throughout our analysis. The fact that not all voices were heard does not invalidate the concerns that *were* voiced to us. The fact that the language used in some of the interview questions was a source of confusion does not mean that participants were unable to articulate their research process. Finally, the fact that participants were often biased to frame their responses in ways they saw as helpful to the library and sensitive to their relationships with librarians did not prevent them from offering any criticism or from suggesting research support that they imagined was outside the role of the library.

II. The Scholarly Domain of Religion

Unifying Characteristics

The scholarly domain of religion is vast. Scholars at Vanderbilt are spread over multiple Departments and even Colleges. They each bring different research interests, kinds of work, and disciplinary assumptions to bear on "religion," which is itself a rather amorphous scholarly construct. It is tempting to imagine, as many of the participants reminded us, that nothing unites these scholars other than the topic of religion, suggesting that our efforts may be wasted. We are, therefore, quite pleased to note the existence of several characteristics that unite the research practices of this diverse group, and which suggest specific ways the library can support their work.

Identifying with Humanities rather than Social Sciences

The topic of religion has been studied within the confines of a number of disciplines, including many of the social sciences, such as Sociology, Cognitive Psychology, and Political Science. However, it was clear from interviews that many of these other approaches would not be considered as legitimate parts of scholarship on Religion, resulting in a degree in Religion or Theology from Vanderbilt University. This Humanities orientation was not simply an artifact of our sample. Neither the Divinity School nor the Graduate Department of Religion includes faculty working within such approaches. Participants indicated their affinity with the Humanities in two main ways.

First, they rejected the language of the social sciences, including especially the term "data," as discussed in Section II.

> "But not data like quantitative sense, right? So not data in terms of the social sciences. If work in the humanities can produce data, I don't know."
>
> "I mean, the theory is – and that led me down this conversation with the social sciences because I think theology tends to use theory and practices, two different, whereas the social sciences use theory and data, so I was thinking some about this question because I think we don't talk about data in the same way."

> "Well, if they mean [data] in a very broad context, then I guess yes. If they mean it in as what a social scientist would produce, or what a biologist would produce, no. Absolutely not."

Second, they explicitly identified their work and their discipline with the Humanities.

> "And I locate my own research in the Humanities side of Religious Studies. Probably speaking, if we're to talk about people who do social sciences, social scientific approaches to religion or Humanities approaches. I see myself as a Humanities scholar. In terms of the types of questions and the methods that I'm using."

> "We really are still a book, a monograph culture within the Humanities in general, and particularly within theology."

Participants also identified the problems of their own discipline with more general problems in the Humanities as a whole:

> "I think all of the Humanities right now have severe challenges with funding, with positions. I mean it's completely insane. […] But then Religious Studies more generally as a part of the Humanities. The Humanities are under attack in the media, they are under attack in the budgets of [provosts], their under attack in the way the universities conceiving itself."

> "The Humanities are dying because people in the Humanities aren't writing anything that anybody outside the Ivy Tower is ever going to be able to read. So they don't know what's going on with the Humanities and people in the outside world were like, 'Well, what are they doing? Why should our tax money go to support them when, you know, they're not doing anything for us, we've never seen anything that they do, we don't understand what they're writing, you know, so why are we giving tax money for grants to support what they're doing? What they're doing has no relevance to what we need.'"

Even in cases where scholars are not situated entirely within the humanities, they speak in relation to the overarching orientation of the field, as is clear from this reflection by an anthropologist in the Religious Studies Department:

> "Is the study of religion a topic in the Humanities or the Social Sciences is the question. Anthropology as a discipline tends to define itself as a Social Science, though a lot of the work we do is interpretive. It draws a lot from literature. It draws a lot on subjectivity. And the study of religion is usually thought of as Humanities, because it's a textual discipline. I work on the intersection of both. So humanistic social science."

Eclecticism

Practically all of the scholars we interviewed mentioned using methods, theories and other ideas borrowed from other fields, especially other Humanities-oriented disciplines. In fact, every single participant brought up disciplines other than Theology or Religious Studies at least once during the interview. On average, other disciplines came up more than 4 times during a single interview. Participants mentioned other theories when discussing their own training and background, the theories

on which they draw in their research, and the journals in which they publish. Notably, none of the scholars we interviewed presented us with a professional identity located wholly within either Religious Studies or Theology. Two situated themselves somewhere between Theology and Religious studies. Others identified with one or the other, but then also identified with another discipline entirely such as Psychology or History. The remaining scholars of religion described themselves fully in terms of other disciplines, typically related to their training. These identities included: historian of religion, language area specialist, textualist, medievalist, historian (4), and psychologist of religion, anthropologist of religion, Asian studies specialist, Jewish cultural studies scholar, religious historian, Biblicist, philosopher (2), and intellectual historian.

Emblematic of these characteristics within both Theology and Religious Studies, one of the few scholars with a background specifically in Religion describes a professional identity as follows:

> "So one of the things I like about my area is its sort of eclecticism and interdisciplinary. And it's also what makes my area difficult, you know. It would be simpler if I could just say, 'Well, I'm in New Testament and that's it, you know, that's just it.' I mean, I think they do use the New Testament in a lot of other disciplines, but… So I would describe my work as falling kind of in an intersection between Religious Studies and Theological Studies, with a definite lean towards Theological Studies."

This eclectic training appears to be carried into methods and approaches among scholars:

> "Religious Studies doesn't have a method of its own. Neither does Theology. Theology, or Biblical Studies, we have a book. It's not like History, where there's certain historiographical concerns that you might use, or Physics, where there are clearly certain formulae that are important. This is why I can't be pinned down methodologically, because my field doesn't have a method. It's got phenomena or data. […] So what happens? Because we don't have a method, we look to other disciplines that do. And then we borrow."

> "But I think that's a problem in theology and religious studies. We don't have canons for the whole field to determine what's important and what's not, so it really just become a matter of taste. In different journals we do this kind of stuff, or we do this kind of stuff. So I think there's a fragmentation, balkanization of the field where that hinders the sense that we're actually talking with each other and moving forward."

> "But in terms of a strategy, I use the full set of literary critical tools that I can muster. So for instance, by treating the stories as fictions, and the subjects as fictional characters, I end up with a very different reading than if I assume that it's a mythology or theology or something like that. So I run at it from a number of different directions and then try to work from that base."

> "I would say the main theoretical approaches I use would be--anthropologists would see it as insufficient, but--as an appropriation of anthropological methods for the study of culture to history. So I call myself a cultural historian. A good example of this would be the way I might use the work of [anthropologist] in my work.

> "I mean, there's a wealth I guess, and I don't know, I guess I'm slightly promiscuous in my theoretical leanings. So I'm not kind of tied down to one method."

The eclecticism of religion scholars suggests that the field is a microcosm of the Humanities more generally in terms of research support needs.

Texts are Central

Scholars were also unified by a central focus on texts. References to texts and documents came up in all the interviews, sometimes as objects of study in themselves:

> "It uses that kind of particular case study to do I guess essentially two things. The first is to kind of rethink the way we think about religious texts and writing and get us to think about texts not just as things that we read and have all these books on my shelves and I spend most of my time reading them. But also things that people engage in for a variety of reasons that aren't necessarily tied to the meaning of the words on the page. As an ethical practice, as a patronage practice, as a communal practice, as a material practice and kind of rethinking about the way we think about writing."

> "Alright. So, I'm interested in textuality, that's how texts come to mean something within particular communities. […] I'm particularly interested in ways that the social forces of the imperial rule shaped the culture of communities and how these communities used texts as instruments of resistance to maintain cultural cohesion and, in some ways, to rewrite a story of repression with a story of actualization, self-actualization for the community."

> "…what I deal with, I describe them as … morphemic, phonemic, semic objects. That is, the words that are in a text are not only there in terms of vehicles to work to the reference, but rather they are material objects that are circulating through a text."

But practically all of them described working with texts extensively in their work:

> "One way that my methods differ somewhat from most people in my field is that, I don't focus on one single textual source, it's a common model an older model in my field especially too. You find one text and translate into all the theological work for it. And then do commentary on that text, or to focus on the works of one author, know you. I try to identify many different texts that will then help me answer the kind of research questions I'm interested in, which don't really rely on any particular genre or author."

> "I'm collecting them because I'm worried about this object. So, off we go into the text. Into just the old -- I mean my bread and butter. That's what I'm trained in. I'm a textual -- I'm a medievalist. I'm a textualist. So, off I go and back into this traditional textual work, but with these new angles, I guess, or threads or new narrative points to push."

> But of course, there are parallels and intersections [between texts and fieldwork] all the time, right, because you can't get access to texts without talking to people and understanding what they do; and you can't understand people without looking at

> texts sometimes, and the ways in which religious scriptures or even other stuff, historical stuff informs contemporary reality in practices."

Because of this centrality of texts, these scholars have a great demand for books and documents, and spend much of their time tracking down texts. All of this work with texts creates a conundrum for these scholars. On one hand, they need to access a variety of texts quickly, making electronic documents and e-books the most obvious solution. On the other hand, some of them communicated a desire for handling texts, whether because they are fragile and require skill to read or because the scholar works best by annotating the text. E-books in particular were criticized by scholars because of inconvenience with annotating them.

The importance of texts also often makes proficiency in the languages of those original texts essential. As will be discussed in the next section, language proficiency was emphasized far more often by Religious Studies faculty and Biblicists than among historians and theologians, but most of the scholars mentioned language proficiency at some point:

> "But we're all closet linguists. And that's another issue. A lot of people who are working, particularly in contemporary traditions, often don't get the kind of linguistic training that's necessary. It used to be standard issue. If you were going to study religion, you had to study -- if you were going to think about studying Christianity without knowing Greek or Latin, it was impossible. But today, with some of the theoretical orientations, the language is considered not necessary, and that's also a mistake. But I don't see that being that widespread. But it is reflective in the catalogues in certain of our presses that publish religious studies. No language. All in English."

> "Also another thing is language training. Google translate or any official translator. If you're going to recognize the difference, you need to do language. You can't just depend on what the translator has done. So in that sense, yeah, in terms of religious studies, you don't have enough people doing language. Biblical languages, or if you're doing German or French or Arabic or whatever."

> "So to answer that [research] question, […] first of all you would have to know [language of text] to read this and figure out what's going on."

> "Well, in this coming one, it always has philosophical research methods, right? Which basically means reading a whole bunch of philosophical work, sometimes in the original language."

In each of these cases, scholars place particular value on original texts rather than translations, reiterating the centrality of texts and also privileging particular perspectives on these texts.

General concerns

The final unifying characteristic of these religion scholars is a common experience with and understanding of the University as a place to pursue an academic career. Most talked about working within a tenure system and demands for publishing, desires to engage communities outside of academy, and concerns with funding.

The university tenure and promotion system was often brought up when participants began to describe their publishing practices, especially when explaining decisions about where to publish and the kinds of publications they were pursuing (e.g., books vs. articles):

> "I don't follow any systematic plan, in fact the reason I started doing articles, I published a cluster of articles over the past few years, was mainly because I was coming up a few years ago for full professor and my Dean was saying, 'Well you should probably get some more peer review articles.' So I did."

> "Yeah, the requirements for tenure -- you have to write a book. Books are encouraged; peer-reviewed journal articles are encouraged. So those are the things that everyone has to do."

> "I usually don't publish in book chapters because [my committee] doesn't value book chapters, they like peer review journal articles. But for [other country] it's kind of worked out for personal connections and things that people have wanted me to publish.

> "If you look at that top shelf of books up there, those are all [non-Western] publications. And I have tried to send a few minor publications to locations like that. The problem is for tenure, those don't really support your tenure bid. So once I have tenure, I will publish even more strongly in those contexts, where the quality of my work can just stand for itself. Sometimes when you're pre-tenure, you have to have a big name publishing you because there's an insider self-reinforcing system..."

Tenure also came up when scholars gave reasons against public engagement and reasons not to publish in open access journals that reach a wider audience:

> "I guess as an untenured faculty member I don't think that the effort that would go into making your data more available is something that would be valued by the University, in terms of tenure review and stuff like that. I don't see them, viewing the fact that you made data publicly available as something that would be favorable for your tenure case. I think it would be just completely neutral. So given just time constraints and stuff I don't foresee me engaging in, you know, strong efforts to make kind of raw data more publicly available at this stage of my career."

> "I've been invited to produce material with open access journals and stuff, but I will not do that because I'm not convinced that the Tenure and Promotion Committee, here, at Vanderbilt, will value that in any way, shape or form. I just don't think it will count towards my portfolio. If it's not a peer review journal and a sort of established kind of a journal, it doesn't help me in the evaluation that I'm going to get. So, for me, it's not really even a choice that I entertained, even though I think it's wonderful to have knowledge freely available to all people. I'm certainly supportive of that, but from my vantage point, the university does not support that, so it's foolish for me to play that game then."

> "I guess one reason I love them is that it sits there free and online, but of high academic quality. But now I definitely have a resolve to do that. But again, it's a fine line for a junior faculty member. Are you going to turn down, if you're invited to

> publish somewhere prestigious but it's a publisher that has very expensive practices? If you're a junior scholar, you might need to still do that."

Thirdly, and standing in tension with the second point, most of the scholars agreed that engaging with the public was an important part of their role as scholars.

> "...I've always been committed to having a voice in public affairs a little bit, because I feel like particularly in the case of religion in [country], which tends to be very contentious, the debate is very contentious and very ill-informed. So you need voices of sanity based on actual practices as opposed to people's assumptions about relations between religions. [...] So it needs people like me to not just be confined to academic journals, which very few people will read, but actually to get that word out in public as much as possible."

> "...it's just public service, right? So, I'm like 'Yes. If I could get these xenophobic questions, put them on the table, because otherwise I don't get a chance to address them directly. [...] So, yeah, there's a utility to it. It's a public service. I don't think it has anything to do with -- well its public intellectual. So, you're there, I'm there by virtue of the authority that I'm given as a professor."

> "... every time you turn on the TV and you see these ridiculous conversations happening and you perceive them as ridiculous, however, [...] a lot of people are not seeing it as ridiculous. They don't know the nuances that aren't being presented there. They don't see these broader pictures and know these longer histories. These opinions are affecting us all. [...] So it just sort of opens us up to more conversations if we're willing [to deal] with the non-academic sphere in a way. I think that's a real opportunity. [...] I do think we're in a moment where those of us who are in higher education, have a responsibility to theorize who we educate and how differently because there is to a certain extent, we're doing a lot by being in a classroom with students who are so prolific in social spheres."

> "At a certain point, and for most people it's usually after tenure, it's easier to speak out and you take the unfortunate term 'public intellectual' but one can take what one knows and say, 'Here's a place where what I know might do some good.' [...] So what I can do is speak to groups without creating demonization on either side, and I can do it from a perspective of biblical knowledge."

> "So my main research area is on what today is a minority language [...] and it has a minority community in the Middle East that exists to the present. So I do see my work as serving those communities, answering questions that might be of interest to them about their heritage, and then also making their heritage available as part of the world's heritage, as an understudied, threatened community heritage."

Finally, participants across the board consistently mentioned funding challenges and concerns about how the public understands the relevance of their field, both of which tended to go hand-in-hand. Notably, these concerns were often expressed within larger concerns about the Humanities more generally.

> "So I think it's communicating the relevance of the Humanities more broadly but religious studies as well clearly fits into being interculturally agile and global citizen. Religious Studies I think is at the heart of that mission but strangely in the proposals that the university pushes plays no role whatsoever."

> "Theological studies is somewhat more challenged than Religious Studies, but both are, I think, I think there is an ongoing questions in academia broadly about our relevance to education, and our claim to be legitimate avenues of research."

> "[Challenges] to my field? Economics. Departments of Religion are being closed. We're looked at as a boutique field. Parents think, "Oh my kid is going to major in Religion." That's worse than majoring in English. At least in English, you can read. But Religion, you chant. So some departments have been under threat."

> "Well, challenges of branding I think are important. What I mean is having explicit narratives about the field of Religious Studies, the kind of training, the kind of research that this as a field within the Humanities offers to students. We have sparse enrollments. Religious Studies are normally small departments. In a time where everyone is all high on diversity and internationalization and post-colonialism, comparative religion is an obvious way to be deeply engaged with the diversity of world civilization and cultures."

> "And also, because Religious Studies and Jewish Studies do not necessarily lead to an MBA or what our government call job-related skills, obviously related skills, as opposed to things like critical reading or citizenships, then students and/or their parents will say, 'Why don't you major in something that you can do something with?' So more and more, Religious Studies can become a service thing. And what counts, if you didn't know, are tushes in seats. And consequently, rather than teaching nuanced and complex material, you have to do basically lots of Intro stuff, and Intro stuff in an uninteresting way -- an interesting way in terms of entertainment, but not interesting in terms of scholarship."

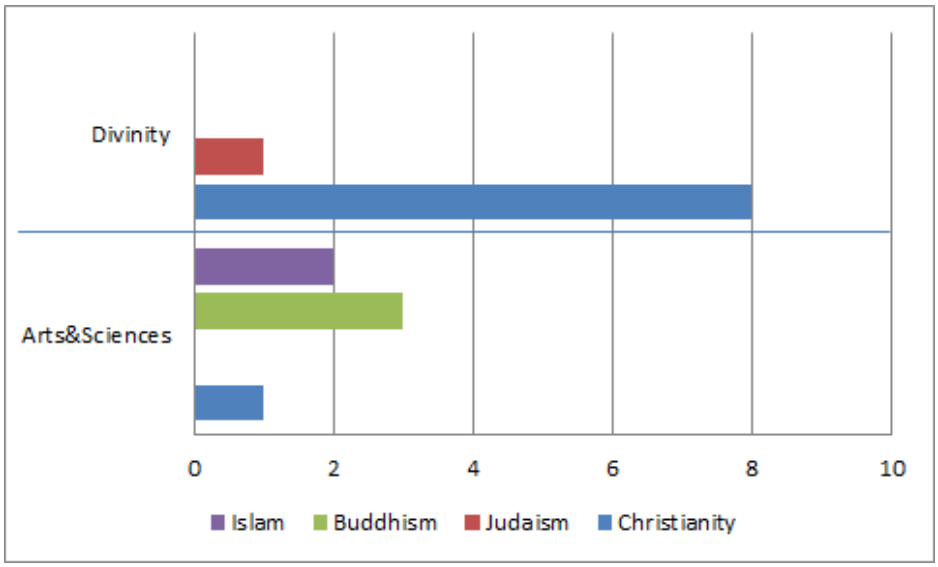
> "The greatest challenge I would say, there are two. One is the general threat to the Humanities. In the Academy, we fall within that. But within the Humanities I see Religious Studies as being one of the more vulnerable fields. We're having to justify, to rationalize our existence to people who are interested in increasingly professionalized models of the University and undergraduate education. Undergraduate education let's say and graduate education that's a whole other conversation about preparing for academia versus other kinds of careers."

In conclusion, despite the diversity and eclecticism observed among our participants, there were a number of points on which all tended to agree. These similarities form a core around which it will be possible to characterize scholarship on religion and think about research support needs of the scholars involved.

III. Analytical Distinctions among scholars of religion in study

At the beginning of the project, we recognized two broad distinctions among scholars of religion: based on Affiliation (College of Arts & Sciences vs. Divinity School) and Position (tenured vs. untenured faculty). We recognized that School and Departmental affiliation would impart differences based on expectations of other scholars and especially tenure committees, as well as the histories of the Departments, and finally the students they predominantly teach.

We were able to include nine faculty from the Divinity School and six from the College of Arts & Sciences. Comparing faculty across the Schools reveals important differences in responses to our interview, which could be attributed to any number of distinctions between them, including differences in administration and institutional history, but also by religious tradition. Faculty in the Divinity School all work within the Judeo-Christian tradition. Most scholars of Religious Studies in the College of Arts & Science at Vanderbilt work in other religious traditions (e.g. Buddhism and Islam).



We hypothesized that differences in position would emerge from orientation toward tenure, both related to the extent of their scholarship as well as the length of time since graduate training. While we attempted to achieve a balance in sampling among all of these groups to test this hypothesis, hiring patterns in the past few years have produced a situation in which there are very few junior faculty in the Divinity School and many junior faculty in the College of Arts & Science. Ultimately this situation confounds our abilities in many cases to determine whether differences between participants were based more on Position or Affiliation.

Different Approaches to Religion

As an alternative to comparing scholars by schools, we also identified three broad Disciplines or areas in which our participants worked, which only weakly map onto the Divinity/Arts & Sciences division. We conducted additional comparative analyses based on these three areas, which we are designating as *Theology*, *History* and *Religious Studies*, in order to define the differences in the use of texts. Altogether, we interviewed five scholars who do Theology, seven who do Religious Studies work (engaging in critical theories of religion -- i.e. from a position of agnosticism regarding to the truth claims of that religious tradition), and ten who do History.

Scholars who identified with Theology were only found in the Divinity School. Of the nine Divinity faculty, five indicated theological commitments. Faculty who identified with History were drawn evenly from each School, though a greater proportion of A&S faculty (5 of 6) identified with historical methods than in the Divinity School (5 out of 9). Most scholars who identified with Religious Studies were affiliated with the College of Arts & Science, though at least one Divinity faculty told us that they see themselves as more aligned with Religious Studies than Theology. Religious Studies and History overlap substantially, to the extent that five of the seven scholars in HACTOR told us they do historical work. It seemed in many cases that the approach to religion taken by historians was similar in many respects to that in Religious Studies:

> "Now certainly again, it's a highly contested field so I don't think you would find any standard definition that anyone would agree on, but I think the thing that would be different is in my mind, the historian is, generally speaking, telling a story about the past and often stopping short of what the implications of that story may be ethically, normatively for the present. Many do go one more step. Whereas in most branches of theology, it does include some sort of value statement, speaking to a particular community, or from a particular community. There are grey areas. Historical theology is more like what historians do, and in some parts of the discipline of history, this fact value or distinction is just contested or disputed."

Participants identifying with History as a discipline were evenly divided between the Field of Study of HACTOR and Historical Studies. While none of the participants from HACTOR identified themselves with Theology, there was also some overlap between Theology and Historical Studies.

Since Historical methods were fairly widespread, overlapping substantially with both Theology and Religious Studies, we regarded the History category as independent of the other two in terms of analysis. In contrast, distinctions between Theology and Religious Studies were far more salient, with the suggestion that they represent alternative approaches to scholarship on religion. We heard two crucial differences between Theology and Religious Studies. The first difference is that Theology is concerned with practical applications and normative themes, while Religious Studies is concerned with academic questions to understand and explain religion:

> "So I would describe my work as falling kind of in an intersection between religious studies and theological studies, with a definite lean towards theological studies. I really like to think about how theology functions – not just religion as a phenomenon, but theology as a way of constructing how we think about religion and normatively, by which I mean that it has value and consequences for religious communities."

> "Theological education creates people for ministry. Religious studies need not; it need not require any sort of theological commitments, affiliation with any type of religious community or hermeneutical cash-out. Religious studies can look at myth, and the role of sacred scripture, reception, history, cultural anthropology or whatever."

The second difference is that theology presumes a core faith, whereas religious studies presumes a more objective stance that is skeptical or agnostic regarding the truth claims of a religion:

> "Theological education, as I understand it, is designed to educate people for service to the church, or for service to their god. And that's why that "theos" in there. So theological education typically has some sort of confessional valence to it; religious studies usually does not."

> "I would view historical studies, or history, and religious studies as disciplines, whether rightly or wrongly, that have a presumption of objectivity. That actually probably isn't truly realized or even possible, but there is a sort of understanding of well anybody can use the tools of our discipline and join in the conversation. On the other hand, theological studies in my mind presumes a community or set of communities. Presumes a set of questions or even religious values that define the parameters for conversation."

> "Religious studies departments started to be founded in the late 60s, early 70s, branching off of philosophy departments usually; sometimes classics departments. And the idea was that religion could be studied separate from anything that was confessional. It was a brand new field, particularly in the English-speaking world. Germany had Religionswissenschaft, which is really confessional; they just didn't acknowledge that it was."

Perhaps because these distinctions were so salient, two of the Divinity faculty situated themselves somewhere between theology and religious studies:

> "I think I am in multiple places in some ways. On the one hand, definitely theological studies, because [...] there are theologians with whom I engage in the project I understand it to be, a project geared toward constructive philosophical theology. But there are plenty of theologians who will never read that book too. There is also in my work, more generally speaking, too, a religious studies connection."

> "My own work presupposes a religious studies framework. However, the people with whom I work, the students, presuppose the theological ones. So I need to be fluent in both forms of discourse."

Religious Studies as Field or Discipline?

The scholars we interviewed reliably referenced the questioned status of Religious Studies as a discipline as opposed to a field of study. Based on our interviews, scholars of Religious Studies are extremely diverse in terms of how they approach the topic of religion, but this diversity gives way to criticism of Religious Studies in terms of its legitimacy as a Discipline:

> "I think the problem is the field of religion itself. We are so disparate. PhDs in religion range from, 'I'm going to do a study of Schleiermacher's use of the Holy Spirit.' [...]. To looking at how people in Micronesia understand crop rotation in light of the gods, to 'What was St. Paul doing in prison in Philippi?' We don't have anything to talk with each other about; in that sense, we are an incoherent discipline. People may take an introductory course in religion in terms of religious methodology, so we learn about method ritual and we learn about -- and you read some of the classics. You probably

> read in anthropology as well. So William James, and Victor Turner, and Clifford Geertz, and a little bit of Charles Long. That's all fine.
>
> But then we go off and do what we do, and most of that stuff nobody does anymore. So now we have this common methodological basis that nobody uses. We find our designated theorist. 'I'm going to read this through, and if your theorist isn't my theorist, I don't care what you're doing.' And we all go into our little cubby holes.

Many of the scholars we interviewed told us that the field of Religion, and Religious Studies in particular, lacks a core identity.

> "In religious studies, probably the main core, I would say, are a set of theoretical tools about the study of religion and/or the comparative study of religion or the practice of religion or ritual studies. But in my mind, there's less of an agreed upon core to what is religious studies than there is to history."
>
> "I think religious studies is partly an amorphous and highly contended discipline. So I'm not sure you could come with a definition that would satisfy everyone."
>
> "Let's be generous and say Religious Studies has not done a great job. It's still trying to brand identify itself within the humanities and that's the challenge."
>
> "The other challenge, I would say is religious studies having to explain what it does in distinction to say what the new schools do. The kind of lack of general understanding about what it is that Religious Studies scholars do or what the study of religion entails. Some of this confusion may be due to internal disagreements among Religious Studies scholars themselves, but I do see that as another challenge for the field as a whole you know. In this climate of a treat to the Humanities for us to be able to do that."
>
> "But I think that's a problem in Theology and Religious Studies. We don't have canons for the whole field to determine what's important and what's not, so it really just become a matter of taste. In different journals we do this kind of stuff, or we do this kind of stuff. So I think there's a fragmentation, balkanization of the field where that hinders the sense that we're actually talking with each other and moving forward."

The contested status of Religious Studies is further demonstrated by the difficulty GDR faculty have had in determining a name for its "Area of Study" within the program, settling on the rather cumbersome name History and Critical Theories of Religion, known by its acronym HACTOR (and recently changed, see footnote earlier). This lack of coherence was occasionally attributed to the short history of Religious Studies or to the failure of its practitioners to formulate a "canon." Another culprit mentioned was the problematic identification of "religion" as an object of study:

> "The other [problem] being perhaps that Religion is not a legitimate category of study at the academic level, say versus Politics or the Economy you know. [...] Religion is not recognized as a category in its own right."

> "...in the case of Religious Studies--I think this has been true since the inception of the discipline, if you can even call it that--real conflict over what constitutes our object of study. What is religion and what's not? And where do you draw the line between religion and what's not? I think that's it for Religious Studies."

The contested status of Religious Studies as a Discipline seemed to provoke its senior scholars in many cases to establish firm boundaries to differentiate it from other disciplines like the Psychology of Religion, Sociology of Religion and Anthropology of Religion. For instance, one HACTOR professor pronounces a core to Religious Studies and immediately illustrates how it can be used to distinguish his Discipline from those of other scholars:

> "...I'm a theories of religion person, and we argue now that theories of religion is the lingua franca for religious studies department. So, that's why, for example, an anthropologist comes in innocently and is not -- can feel disengaged from that wider religious studies specific conversation, which is critical theory, critical category of religion."

As noted earlier, all of our scholars agreed to certain ideas that were cross-disciplinary. While both Divinity and Arts & Sciences faculty brought up the importance of language proficiency (three of each), the latter talked about it more often (12 times vs. 6 times) than their colleagues, who enjoy a more firmly established position within Academe. Even more suggestive, regardless of School affiliation, all of the scholars who emphasized the importance of language proficiency identified themselves with Religious Studies in one way or another during the interview.

Though none of the scholars recognized it explicitly in the interviews, those who identified most firmly with Religious Studies were further distinguished from their colleagues through a core reliance on obscure textual sources in their research, which were difficult for other scholars to access:

> "The stuff that I work on -- part of the problem, and this interview may not help you guys that much … what I work on, nobody else works on. And in that sense there aren't materials to be found. What I dig up, often serendipitously, is all there is. I have the only extant copy of a number of things that I've looked at, as far as we know. I can't find them in any library anywhere. They may exist somewhere but not accessible."

> "And the final thing which I guess is more of a tool than data is I run a website that's connected to these documents, a collection of ten thousand documents which have been ignored in western scholarship almost entirely because they have a very complicated history."

The texts that formed the core of their work is frequently written in a language with limited or no modern speakers, a point that supports the noted importance of language proficiency in the field. And these sources were only available to those with the resources and skills needed to travel to distant regions of the world. The participants described visiting colonial archives, special collections, temples, and corner bookstores in pursuit of obscure texts.

> "Sometimes, it's just simple access. You're a foreigner, you go to a place in [South Asia], and they're suspicious of you. Why do you want to look at this material? There

> must be some ulterior motive. We're all CIA people. No foreigner ever speaks [language]. So if you do, you must be up to something, so there are all kinds of hurdles put in your way."
>
> "The biggest challenge is actually access to archival documents in [Asian country], which requires a lot of particularly -- it took me two weeks of meetings and getting contacts and stuff just to get in there. Whereas the [government of Asian country] Archives, which are formalized archives meant for scholars, was just, you just lined up, and you go in there."
>
> "Some of them [local collections] have published catalogs. And they're often not complete or don't show if they have newer acquisitions or anything like that, or some things that just, for whatever reason didn't make it into the official published catalog. So, in some of those cases you can consult them in advance. In other cases there are some people doing field work cataloging. Going to monasteries different places that we can consider archives, even if they don't have you know professional practices as archivist and documenting the manuscripts that they have in block prints."

Beyond the skills required to access these texts, many scholars emphasized the skills needed to read them:

> "And so the difficulty for me with my first project was just learning how to read and use these documents. The only way to achieve that was to go to [Asian country] and do it; and I did that. I mean I was, I'm not trying to brag, but yeah, I was like the first American to go through rigorous training in how to use these documents in [Asian country]. And so I'm really the only person in America I think that's qualified to use these documents in a responsible way."

The difficulty in accessing these sources, be they texts, notes or images, had the effect of making the scholars' domains of study more exclusive:

> "I'm probably the only person in America that has this pretty good collection of documents in photographic form."
>
> "I mean no one ever collected them, because -- but I'm collecting them because I'm worried about this object. So, off we go into the text. Into just the old -- I mean my bread and butter. That's what I'm trained in. I'm a textualist."
>
> "Nothing's ever been done in this area. Nothing's ever been done on that literature, like systematically like this."
>
> "This literature that I'm working on now, like I said, was dismissed by everyone. In fact, some people say it's not even written in [language], which is not true. What this does is it leaves me hanging out there all by myself, which slows me down because I don't have any help. Nobody else is working on the materials. There's a double responsibility because everything I say is the only thing that has been said; so you become the instant authority whether you want to or not. There's a responsibility

> there that sometimes, quite frankly, is paralyzing. So a lot of my projects end up taking decades. "

However, the exclusivity in object comes with a price which is paid by taking up certain burdens that come with their role. One burden recognized among Religious Studies scholars is the responsibility that comes with the authority of being a public intellectual, an expert on the religion one studies:

> "So, yeah, there's a utility to it. It's a public service. I don't think it has anything to do with -- well its public intellectual. So, you're there, I'm there by virtue of the authority that I'm given as a professor. They make -- the journalists, they do not tire of framing out, 'As a Vanderbilt professor of religion. How would you answer this question from Jack from Murfreesboro?' Oh, okay, I see, right I get it."

Another burden is taken up in their efforts to access the aforementioned obscure sources and bring them into the scholarly domain. There is a sense in which the Religious Studies scholar is the savior of the texts and images on which they work:

> "So you've got this literature; this massive literature that is just lying around rotting that represents for the last five centuries what people have done in a vibrant part of the world. It's really one of the hubs. [...] There's this incredible crossroads of this religious and intellectual traditions that left a huge amount of both literary evidence that is hardly looked at. I have probably read several hundreds of books for which there is a single manuscript, and it's never been published. It's all handwritten. And we're talking not small things, here. Major works. And the whole of [South Asian country] is like this. There are tens of thousands of handwritten books that are still around that have never seen the light of day. In some instances, like I said, a single manuscript. And in some instances, even multiple manuscripts and still hasn't been published because nobody works on this."

Many of the scholars also took on the burden to share these texts (and/or their work on them) more broadly, beyond the academy:

> "The online stuff, you know, I think the data that I think is relevant, it makes its way into publication. I think that's something probably a lot of scholars including me, I think we could be better at. I mean making that data available and data sets available. I think for historians and stuff there's a tendency to keep it private and not know if it be useful or not have venues to make it available. So I think that is something that would be useful to do."

These burdens to preserve these materials and bring them into the public sphere are made heavier by other obligations that antagonize them. The tenure system, for example, rewards scholarly publications, which are by nature exclusive. Junior scholars in particular point out the tension between efforts to launch their academic career and their burden to engage the public:

> "At this point in my career I don't think it's something that Vanderbilt truly values. I think they might pretend they value it but they really want peer reviewed articles in high profile journals. That's what they want and they want books. And so I'm trying to dedicate my attention more to make the people that decide my tenure case happy

> and maybe down the road it might be something I'd be interested in exploring more."
>
> "Yeah, I have a blog but it's a very specialized blog and I did register and I got an email from [Online news source] asking if I'd be a contributor. I think I told them, yes but I haven't done anything with that. At this point, I mean I think for two reasons, one because of my specialty being [topic] is a little bit of a less popular market for it. That's not to say that there is none there is certainly less of a popular market. And two, at this point in my career I don't think it's something that Vanderbilt truly values. I think they might pretend they value it but they really want peer reviewed articles in high profile journals. That's what they want and they want books."

In summary, Religious Studies scholarship is dependent on the availability of texts that may have received very little or no scholarly attention in the past. Scholars seek out opportunities to discover and access these texts, and access has the potential to spur new discoveries or insights.

IV. Research Process

All participants were asked to describe the various aspects of their research process. The interview itself did not seem to impose any particular vision of this process. As noted earlier, questions about research tended to be reinterpreted by our participants to better reflect considerations they saw as more relevant. When asked, participating faculty gave relatively thorough descriptions of their process, as they see it:

> "I'm a Mac user, I use Dictate to help me. [...] If I know I'm going to use the quote, of course, I want to make sure that I put it in correctly, but for just that unconscious streaming of thought, I just speak it in and I don't have to even type it in. And then I go back to these long outlines and I try to discover what truth is in that for me, at this moment - what's the theme, how does the argument flow? And of that, I write my chapter, only going back to the sources if I cannot make sense of my outline, which happens sometimes, but that's the only time I go back to books. I just really work from this [copious] outline that I've created. So, yeah, a little bit about my - so I don't know quite what method is that, but it's just more of a process."

> "Now you might ask how you arrive at who to read, that's a legitimate question. Because that too is part of a research method. I think I begin with problems, the analysis of problems. That is I see certain contemporary ways of understanding a topic like a classic Christian claim or teaching. There are various things that I find unsatisfactory about it, but some things I find promising. The first thing is … If I notice a series of thinkers that seem to be having the same difficulty, then I think I've identified a problem. That is a problem where consistently some sort of deadlock, or something impassable has been found. The way we're talking about this idea is promising partially, but partially seems to be faltering at some point. I try to identify what seem to me to be problems, these can be internal problems that is things that

> just don't seem consistent. Two things are said about this idea, and they don't seem really to fit together.
>
> So I'm looking to alleviate both internal consistency problems and external dissonance problems. That's how I begin. That's the first stage is identifying the problem, and the second stage is I have certain thinkers that are basic orientation points for me, [name of thinker] is one of them that I'm working on.
>
> Like I might be consulting secondary scholarship … even while I'm translating a passage for example. Because a lexical resources in languages I work on are not very comprehensive. And there's a lot of technical terms, or things that get used in the text that I work on, that you know a specialist say in [p or q], you know if they're a secondary scholarship on those field. I might end up consulting things to see okay am I understanding this term correctly in this context because they may be referring to some more specialized context that I'm not aware of, so there is that level.
>
> I guess at the level starting to think about you know interpretations that I can start to generate from this text, that's also another phase where I'm reading secondary scholarship to sound off I guess. And then of course finding out the historical details. But that can all be happening in the same day."

> So if I were to describe it formally, I would say that I look at the… I started with the categories for theory [...] and methods of hermeneutics. So I sort of immerse myself in that, and then I go and find the data, if you will, and sit with the data, collect the data and sit with the data, and then, at a certain point, begin to write the story.
>
> So, I'm interested in [x, y and z]. This is embarrassing. You've got a whole lot bunch of articles and books on [x and y] and just start reading there. And, at certain point, when I started reading articles that were - I had read the material in the footnotes, I felt like I could move on, so then I moved on to [w]. And I looked at [w] and I did the same thing. [...]
>
> And then I began to look at just source after source in [z] interpretation, you know, beginning with [y], really, in the 18th century, and just kind of going through and tag, looking for uses of [x]. And so that was looking at anthologies to get first, you know, primary sources and then - yeah, [z] anthologies and then just - geez, going to the Internet and find old sermons, and I go look in the library [...] And then I came up with a [q] typology, after just kind of immersing myself in the primary sources. Then I began to - and I've categorized the sources, but I began to pick the ones that I would use for each era. And then, at that point, I felt like I could tell the story, I could write. So, it's haphazard, but it's sort of the way that I - you know."

Several of the scholars explicitly presented their research process as reiterative rather than linear, involving interconnected cycles of activity.

> "I never thought about that process to describe it. Because I feel like there is different steps often can cycle with the same day or week so I guess it's not as fair cut as that."

In spite of disciplinary differences, scholars across the spectrum described five main activities:

1) Deciding on a topic or text to study, which may actually emerge by first
2) studying the topic through engaging with primary and/or secondary texts, which involves
3) discovering and accessing (in either order) those texts (or images), for the purpose of
4) analyzing these texts (and thereby possibly discovering more relevant texts), and, in the process of doing all of the above
5) Writing books or articles that describe and discuss the insights gained through these analyses.

Deciding a Topic

New topics of research are often introduced serendipitously. Participants described how new topics can emerge from any number of situations: preparing for a class, reading something for another topic, discovering a new text or image, or as a hunch:

> "It always seems like whatever I'm starting you know, you get an idea that comes from somewhere else, right? That you were working on a project and then you find some things that you can't address in this project. You kind of set aside, okay I'll pick this up later. So there's that element of serendipity. I would say in terms of what is the next project or the next set of materials and so on that I'm going to work on. There's always some previous point that got you to it."

> "I mean, and some of that is you have a hunch and then you have to kind of let the research lead you. So it's just weird to cut that off and get back to what you thought you were going to do."

> "Again, I'm looking for one thing, but because I am receptive to these other kinds of questions that I have there, it will click. So it's happenstance, where it will happen, but what I attempt to do is create an argument to show that it's actually unmanaged. "

Sometimes topics were given to them by colleagues or editors:

> "I also write often in response to requests and find that, sometimes, if people are putting together a conference and ask me, "Would you contribute this?" it really draws things out. "

> "I mean, the [name] lecture was a good example of how I sort of – so that I was really thinking, 'I'm just going to have a little bit at the beginning on [name], and then I'm going to get to what I really think I'm going to be writing. And then I just got really interested in [name] and that actually became the more interesting part of the lecture. And I don't think that was all bad, it's just it isn't really what I wanted to do."

Finally, some topics emerge through the discovery of a particular text or image.

> "And then, another thing that kind of develops, and this chapter would be a good example, is that sometimes I find a really intriguing piece of work that I want to analyze in depth. And it may just end up being a small portion of the chapter, but, in this case, [...] I found myself really just reading it, going back. [...] so that would be another example of sort of getting fascinated by somebody's work, in particular, and wanting to go deeper and understanding it."

> "It's not active. I will not go through texts and look for it, but I now have kind of passive detectors. So when all of a sudden I encounter this, I will stop. It may be the fourth time I've passed it by, and I go back and discover it. It was there already three times, or it wasn't. But it's there. I won't always pick up on it, but it's there passively waiting to ping. So I'm receptive to these. That's how I trained myself, I disciplined myself so that I can be more sensitive to this material and I pick it up. Not all the time, but I am able to do it because of this discipline."

> "I just sort of took a year and went into the archives and just sort of bumped around with different archives, got grants to do that kind of work and let the ideas emerge from that."

Regardless of how a topic is generated, the faculty we interviewed were comfortable using the term "research" to describe a range of activities in reference to the topic or question.

Discovering and Accessing Sources

When having a topic in mind, many scholars told us they search for texts that inform the topic. Scholars reported using database searches available through the Library (discussed in greater depth in section 5), as well as Google Scholar. Additional sources are often discovered as a scholar reads various works, through book reviews, and through catalogs from publishers.

> "I do a combination of things when I'm looking for things. I google stuff. I do a library search. I get stuff as I'm reading; I check footnotes for things I'm interested in and find useful sources that way. I talk to people and get recommendations from them, especially if they're experts in things that I don't know about; get their recommendations on what I should read. And follow those paper trails, too, just to see … well, they're going to be a combination of paper and online stuff. If I'm just absolutely purely searching for something, I tend to do a combination of a google search and a library search."

> "I would say in terms of book reviews, it's 100 percent the case for my students and 99% the case for me, that if we don't have electronic access to a book review, I probably won't read it unless it's very, very domain-specific. In other words, if I discover the author of one major book on a topic has reviewed another major author, then I will try to interlibrary loan it. But really, book reviews, if they're not available online, they almost shouldn't exist. Because when would you want a book review? Well, there's basically two cases. One, if you're really interested in a specific topic, but then the book review is almost more like a journal article; you're tracking it down for those reasons. Otherwise, it's I've discovered this book, I'm wondering

> what do other scholars think of it. I'll hop on Discover Library. I'm going to have five electronic reviews. I can read those and it will have taken me ten minutes. Whereas the paper review, I would have to go walk to the library, come back. That's not pragmatic."

> "Once one joins the major professional societies, one gets on the listing for pretty much all the catalogues that come out. So they come to me either by email or -- this is since December -- hard copy of catalogues. Every two months or so, I take a day or so and go over them and mark off what I want and what I don't want. I also subscribe to a number of listserves which provide me reviews of books. I might want to look at that. And because I've been around for a long time, and I know a lot of people, folks are always sending me a "have you seen this" or "did you read that" or "you might want to have a look at this"

> "One way that I really like to work is if I'm interested in a topic and there's some sort of existing publication. Then basically I'll just sit down with its footnotes and bibliography and mine everything that's there. This is an article by a friend. We just sat down with the pdf and we walked through all of the footnotes, and I said, "Get this, get this, get this." And then there is a bibliography at the end. And as they come in, I would either browse them quickly, decide, "Okay, are they useful or are they not?" "

After beginning to explore a topic, scholars explained how they often discovered additional texts that promised to further elucidate it.

> "Well there is a kind of back and forth process between identifying sources and asking questions and finding sources that raise new questions, you know so there's like a back and forth process of that."

> "Yeah, so the articles show me all the books I need to read, the book reviews will confirm either yes or no, and then I identify my sources that I have to tackle. And I tackle that in a free-flowing way of just reading as much as I can for about six months, at which point I just stop and say, 'Okay, that's enough. I've read enough.' And then I start writing by going back to my outlines, which can be 70 to 80 pages per chapter, now.

Throughout the process, scholars discover texts and other sources, find ways to access them, and bring them under local control. They were accessed through a variety of means that included the Vanderbilt library and its physical and digital collections. Scholars also relied on personal collections, comprising mostly physical books and downloaded articles. On this point, for in-depth reading of a text, scholars generally preferred a physical object to a digital one:

> "And with e-books, there's not any way to, with a checked out book, to underline it. And that's kind of important to me, even if I could make it disappear. But it's important for my process. And then you get it for 10 minutes and then it disappears and you have to download it again, half the time, which is very frustrating. And if somebody else has it checked out, you can't necessarily, depending on the rights that

> you have, or that the library has to it, sometimes two or three people, or even ten or 15 can read it at once time, but not everybody can. And you'll never have it. You'll never, ever have it.
>
> Again, you don't even have it like you do a library book, a hard book that you check out, which at least you have in your possession and can go back and flip through it. Just frustrating. They're useful and frustrating at the same time. Like I said, the [French philosopher] -- I could never, ever have read, sat down and read through The [Philosophical work], in French, on that e-book thing. Never, ever, ever. I don't think that's what it's there for. But it was great to be able to find, get to passages that I really wanted to be sure that the translation was actually accurate and decent and then I could check that, and it's perfect for that. But I could never have … if French were my first language, possibly. But not as my second language. It was just too … I need to tell tales for days about my struggles with that. So I would say the technology is still not quite as user-friendly as I hope it will be one of these days."

Once accessed, scholars brought their sources under local control through systems of notes, nearly always relying in some way on citation management software. Even when scholars worked with physical texts, they kept notes, organized ideas and did basically all of their writing on computers. Though it is not generally recognized as an example of "digital humanities," we noted that these Humanities scholars overwhelmingly relied on digital platforms throughout their diverse research processes.

In one case, a scholar helped to create a database of documents with notes on the texts themselves, including efforts at translation, included with each. Another example of the overlap between accessing sources and analyzing them comes through bibliographic software such as Zotero, which allows users to keep track of bibliographic information, link digital files, and keep searchable records of reading notes:

> "Let me show you an example of what this might look like. Here's a bunch of citations that I pulled out of a particular work, and then begun taking notes, if I can find one. Let's see if I can find one. Here's a note right there, saying something. Here's one that I had taken really rich notes on. So I used the note-taking feature in there."

Another scholar describes using Scrivener to keep track of notes and organize writing ideas:

> "I use Scrivener and it's such a great cataloging system for me. As I'm transcribing, I'm keeping notes kind of in other tabs. I did that two hour tutorial that they have to learn how to use a sidetrack. Yeah, most people don't do that but it had so many capabilities if you just let them tell you. So I keep a running note of project notes and then document notes. So sometimes I'll make notes on individual documents and make sure they're compiled where I can see them under a certain folder or tab. I usually am there ... that's how I kind of start where I'm bumping around the sources, keeping a running tab of project notes so I can always refer to those no matter what document."
>
> "I transcribe everything that wasn't transcribed. I look through all my photos which takes a long time. And then I go through all my transcriptions. This took me about six months because I had a lot of transcriptions. I go through my transcriptions, just

> cut and paste into a kind of another kind of sub within that folder and then I have another sub folder within every chapter where I kind of start to sketch how the chapter might be structured. And then in those sketches, I use that folder previously created of chapter specific transcriptions and file those under sections in that document. Then I have another kind of document under each chapter where I do free writing and then I have finally another one for just the actual chapter."

Other digital platforms were used as well:

> "I use a note keeping software called Voodoo Pad that I use to keep notes. I was much more active at it when I was a graduate student, I had more time but I try to keep all of my notes in Voodoo Pad. I make Excel spreadsheets of things, like for example the colophon dates. I mean my research was originally stuff I put in Excel spreadsheets from the start and an Excel spreadsheet for my second project based on place names that appear in texts that I'm looking at because I have some kind of interest in geographic spread of [Asian religion] in my second project.

> "I produce a lot of notes. Lots of notes. Most of them are on my computer in some form or fashion. I've been using Bookends for that purpose. Not Endnote; I had a bad experience with Endnote to begin with."

In some cases, the platforms were makeshift, based on multiple text files organized in sub-folders. One senior faculty member described keeping track of connections among notes on texts thus:

> "Real crudely. I have a huge long file where I come across something and I just write it in. I will just go back and forth because -- I will code it to an extent, what code I put it and how it shows up in the narrative could often be different. It isn't just I have a chapter on dogs; no, it's very specific depending on the text, which will then … it isn't [author] on [x], rather it's about a particular text in which [x] will emerge or whatever."

Though all of the participating scholars described using computers to some extent, some continued using paper notes extensively, even when they experimented with digital alternatives:

> "So I do a couple different things. As I read, I take notes. And typically, I type them. When I get to the point where, as I'm sketching out a chapter or sometimes am in between, I handwrite stuff, which oftentimes I then can't read. But it still helps nonetheless right now, to do that. Sometimes I do weird things like handwrite things and place papers at different points just to move things around a bit. I experimented for a very brief period with Scrivener, which is a writing project drafting software that actually I think was designed for screenwriters originally, not for academics. A grad student of mine recommended it; she really liked it. I just didn't like it in the end; I think if you've grown up on paper, it's hard to just … moving online pieces of paper around was weird. It was not very satisfying to me. So I gave up on that, but there might be something else out there."

The activities described in this section, regarding accessing, discovering and organizing various texts, documents or images, are a large aspect of the research process. While they are prerequisite for the next activity, none of these activities is entirely distinct. Anything a scholar reads may generate new

sources or texts that may in turn be sought out and read. Reading produces notes, and sources are organized.

Analysis

No aspect of the research process described by participating faculty overlapped with all others as much as analysis, which included not only reading and working through texts but also note-taking, outlining, and writing. Several of our participants described how they constructed arguments (for scholarly writings or lectures) through reading and working through these texts and writing notes on them:

> "So whenever I tackle a project, I try to read as much as I can from as many varied disciplines as I can master, for about a six months period. And I just read. And I open up - I know I have to have an introduction and a conclusion, I know I have to get about four or five, six chapters - I open up documents and, as I read, I plop in my first definition of data, which is just knowledge of sorts, I plop that in in a very almost an unconscious way. I don't try to think about it much, but if something is interesting to me or a quote or a line or something, I just put it in there. And for about six months, I just read, believing - and that's, I think, more of the psychoanalytic approach - believing that out of all that, just sort of more of an unconscious read of stuff, images will arise, themes will arise, that I want to explore more deeply."

> "So when I go into a project, I don't know necessarily what's the argument that I'm going to make, other than that I think the issues or concerns that I'm bringing together is really worth bringing together. When I set up with my [topic] book, I did not know in advance that the baseline conclusion that I'm making in the book is going to be that - I didn't know that, but it evolved out of the work that I did. So I read for about six months and, since I read across a lot of disciplines, I need access, then, to sociology, psychology, philosophy, theology, economics. And that's what I appreciate about the library is that we do have access to a wide, wide range of research. I typically begin with articles, just to see what people are writing on things - that's where I begin. Then, by reading articles, I'm exposed to books that I have to read. But before I go to book, I go to book reviews, first, and then to books. So if you follow that kind of a sequence, I need access to a wide range of articles and then I need access to a wide range of journals, which [I often] get through the articles anyway, where the book reviews will be, and then, ultimately, the resources. I'm a person who typically buys most of the resources that I use, personally. That's just the way that I am. I typically purchase - for this [topic] book, I probably purchased 150 books."

Translating might also be important:

> "But doing a new translation means going back and digging through all the primary sources. I mean, if you're going to change -- if you're going to present a new translation, you better have good evidence in the sources. So, one is in the writing stage and the other is coming into the let's say digging, textual digging stage."

Our respondents discussed reading as itself a kind of method, particularly when reading was done in a way that brought new ways of understanding the texts:

> You know, the one that I think I use consistently is a psychoanalytic approach and how especially optic relations theory perceives what would be called "the location of cultural experience," which is that space of experience that's neither objective nor subjective, but something happens between us. We use that language, for instance, "I've been pulled in by a book" - something happens between me and the book. And the location of cultural experience is also the place where research takes place, it's a creative space where something new comes out and [analytical] sort of theoretical orientation, in literature, would be reader response theory, for instance, where somebody reads the book and is not necessarily so interested in what exactly is the author saying. The interest is more what's happening between me and the book?

> "To go to that text and explore how that text problematizes these hermetically sealed boundaries of [x] and [y], how it fudges those boundaries in some important ways and how that fudging, as it were, becomes the space for re-thinking or pushing the thinking around the category of religion. [...] A careful reading brings ups all kinds of problems. [...] There really is plenty of transgressing of those boundaries, deeply transgressed. Right, and all -- again back to my framework -- how are those moves betraying or shining a light on, again, the category of religion, right? [...] Right, so that's simply an essay. That's an essay, right, framing, use, leveraging, a text, right? Like a specific, super, careful reading of a particular text to speak to a wider common discourse."

> Interviewer: So it would be fair to say you do a lot of deep reading?
>
> Respondent: I think that is fair. I think very close reading, looking for arguments, looking to see how claims are warranted, and seeking out connections. Deep reading also in the sense of locating authors contextually and their intellectual and social milieu. And then finding the connections that are illuminating between different thinkers between different milieus. That's how I prefer to work.

Analysis of texts overlapped not only with the process of accessing, reading and cataloguing those texts, but also with the process of writing for scholarly outlets.

> "And then from there, usually what I'm looking at, what I'm able to prove emerges and then the chapter sort of emerges somewhere in there. I usually just kind of have a moment where I'm like there's a chapter, there's a chapter. So then in Scribner, I create the chapter folders and then I have this really long ... it takes a couple of months but it's worth it for when I'm writing and revising."

Scholars told us that they publish mostly books and book chapters, as opposed to articles. One reason cited for this pattern was the tenure system. As mentioned earlier, tenure was also brought up to explain little or no engagement with the public through websites, blogs or popular press publications.

It seems appropriate to note at this point that there were some differences in how scholars describe the work they do with texts. Arts & Sciences faculty were more than 3 times as likely as their Divinity peers to talk about using different theories and social perspectives in order to understand a text better. Only Arts & Sciences faculty talked about translation as being a key part of their work. By contrast, only Divinity scholars described their analysis in terms of thinking or being philosophical. This latter kind of analysis was especially prominent among theologians. Nevertheless, regardless of these disciplinary-based differences, the themes explored in this section — the serendipity of choosing topics, the ongoing and reiterative process of research, and the use of digital platforms in organizing and analyzing texts — were discussed by all of our participants.

V. Summary and Conclusions

Religion as a domain of research is large in scope and diverse in approaches. It might be easy to focus on the breadth of topics and methodologies to conclude it is not a coherent or unified discipline. The study did however find a number of unifying characteristics from our interviews.

Unifying Characteristics

1. Interviewees identified with the humanities rather than the social sciences.
2. Practically all interviewees utilize methods and theories from other disciplines, resulting in an eclectic mixture of approaches. Religious research is virtually always done in relationship with other areas or methodologies.
3. The eclecticism of religion scholars suggests that the field is a microcosm of the Humanities more generally, rather than having a unique or specific type of support need for research.
4. The centrality of texts for these scholars means there is a great demand for books and documents. Much of their research process requires extensive time for search, discovery and acquisition of materials to read and absorb.
5. The scholars interviewed spoke of the importance of engaging with the public about their area of study, but that desire was regularly trumped by the requirements for achieving tenure which constrain or determine where and how they publish.

Thus, despite the diversity and eclecticism observed among our participants, there were a number of points on which all tended to agree. These similarities form a core around which it will be possible to characterize scholarship on religion and think about research support needs for these scholars.

Analytical Distinctions among scholars in Religious Studies and Theology

We heard three crucial distinctions articulated between Religious Studies researchers and those in Divinity/Theology.

1. One difference is characterized as Theology being more concerned with practical applications and normative themes in specific communities, while Religious Studies is concerned with academic questions to understand and explain religion.
2. The importance of texts also brings importance of language and linguistic abilities. Religious Studies researchers emphasize the importance of language skills more frequently than do those scholars who identify more in Divinity/Theology areas.

3. Theology presumes a faith tradition (or community) whereas Religious Studies asserts a more objective stance that is skeptical or agnostic regarding the claims of a religion.

Religion as a Field or a Discipline

The diversity of approaches by scholars of Religion leads to debate about whether it is truly a discipline or is a field of study. The importance of cross-disciplinary methods and resources leaves Religion more amorphously defined than the more traditional fields identified in the Divinity School.

Religious Studies faculty more consistently cited the importance of language proficiency as central to research than did those who self-identified more with Theology.

Religious Studies scholars also rely more strongly on obscure or unique sources for research than do Theology faculty.

In summary, Religious Studies scholarship is dependent on the availability of texts that may have received little or no scholarly attention in the past. Scholars seek out opportunities to discover and access these texts, and access has the potential to spur new discoveries or insights.

The Research Process

The identification of the next topic for research or publication is consistently described as serendipitous rather than a systematic progression.

- The research process was consistently described as reiterative rather than linear.
- Extended time is usually required for discovery, acquisition, reading and note taking prior to the move to the writing process.
- While few of the interviewees consider technology to be a major component in their research, virtually all do use digital tools and software to structure or store their notes and data. [Interestingly, when asked if they use or produce data many of our interviewees had difficulty with identifying what they do as using data.]
- The importance of texts mean that access to books is crucial. While e-books can be acknowledged as having value for discovery, they are consistently rejected as appropriate for extended reading or analysis of the text.

A Note on the Methodology of this Study

One unexpected but clear conclusion from our interviews is that the use of librarians as interviewers may be problematic in such a survey which is focused on identifying the research support needs for faculty. Repeatedly it was noted that where the interviewers were librarians (two of the three interviewers were) the faculty explicitly referenced this as being a 'library project' raising the possibility

that they were censoring themselves by refraining from criticizing the library, or alternatively going out of their way to praise the library staff for their helpfulness.

From the processes described by our participants, particularly those in Religious Studies who emphasized the importance of rare or obscure materials which only they had access to (and not from the library), the research support needs of these faculty are not usually focused on the use of library services. Certainly they all utilize and appreciate the electronic library resources available, and assume that these will be easily available.

Our conclusion in this area is that perhaps the use of library staff as participants in the surveys may be constraining or skewing the results received.