Final Report: Religious Studies Scholarship at Temple University

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Introduction

In October 2015 Temple University Libraries joined 40 other libraries to explore the research practices of faculty in the field of religious studies. Coordinated by Ithaka S+R, the project seeks to understand the resources and services these scholars need to be productive and successful in their research. This report provides a summary of our local findings based on 12 in-depth interviews with Temple faculty. In addition, we consider how our local findings might be applied to improve support for faculty as they pursue their research.

The Department of Religion at Temple

The Department of Temple Religion was established in 1961, having grown out of a previous school of theology in the Baptist tradition. From its beginning the department has been unaffiliated with any particular faith and developed deep roots in interreligious dialogue and interdisciplinary methods in the study of religion. The early focus on the three monotheistic religions - Christianity, Judaism, and Islam - soon broadened to include most other religions and more general religious studies topics such as the death and dying awareness movement, sports and religion, and gender and religion. Today the Temple University Department of Religion includes scholars specializing in Islam, early Christianity, Biblical studies, American Judaism, Japanese, Chinese and Tibetan Buddhism, Afro-Caribbean religions, and the intersection of religion and secular society.

With 19 faculty members (6 professors, 6 associate professors, 3 assistant professors - tenure-track, 3 assistant professors - non tenure-track[1], and one emeritus), the Temple Department of Religion offers the B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. degrees. Undergraduates can also minor in religion or Jewish studies. The department maintains close ties with religious institutions of varying faith traditions, both locally and globally. The faculty are actively engaged in research and annually produce many articles and books in addition to maintaining a busy teaching schedule. The 2015 Student Profile listed the Department of Religion as having 17 undergraduate majors and 54 graduate students. Despite so few undergraduate majors, the department reaches a very large number of students through the university's general education program. Since 2005, the Department of Religion has awarded over 30 Ph.D. degrees.

[1] Technically, 2.5, as one assistant professor is shared with the Intellectual Heritage department

Research Methodology

Our research team was comprised of four librarians: Justin Hill (Access Services), Rebecca Lloyd (Subject Specialist/Liaison for History, Latin American Studies, Spanish & Portuguese Literatures), Fred Rowland (Subject Specialist/Liaison for Classics, Economics, Philosophy, and Religion) and Nancy Turner (Assessment and Organizational Performance). Prior to the start of the project, the department liaison Fred Rowland contacted the Religion faculty to provide them with an outline of the project and its purpose. We all participated in the methods training provided by Ithaka S+R conducted at Columbia Libraries in February 2016. Fred contacted faculty again after training, and matched interested scholars with team members. Twelve faculty members volunteered, and one-on-one interviews were conducted in March 2016. Faculty members who elected to participate in the project represent a range of faculty with varied areas of study and methodologies. Most interviews took place in faculty offices, two were conducted over Skype. We audio-recorded each interview and outsourced the transcription of these recordings.

This table illustrates the representativeness, by rank, of the faculty we interviewed:

Rank	**Interviewed**	**Total Number in Department of Religion**
Full Professor[2]	5	6
Associate Professor	4	6
Assistant Professor	2	3
Assistant Professor, Non-Tenure Track	1	3

We followed the interview protocol provided by Ithaka S+R closely, both in the spirit of a collaborative, multi-library project and to meet the requirements of our Institutional Review Board.[3] The interviews covered four broad areas of research practice: Research Focus, Research Methods, Publishing Practices, and Perspectives on the State of the Field. In this

[2] One of these faculty members was a member of the Department of History
[3] Interview protocol is provided as an Appendix

local report, we focus on the themes and findings that we found most interesting and with most relevance to our local library practice and services, both now and into the future.

Findings

Theory and Methods

Religious studies casts a very wide net that makes it by necessity interdisciplinary. Any of the world's religions, past or present, are potential objects of study, from many theoretical viewpoints, using both humanistic and social science methods. Contemporary religious studies grew out of the study of theology, while many of the theoretical approaches have been drawn from other disciplines such as psychology (Freud), sociology (Durkheim), and anthropology (Geertz).

The Temple University campus hosted a school of theology until 1969 when the Conwell School of Theology merged with another institution out of state.The Temple Department of Religion opened in 1961. To the traditional focus on sacred texts, Temple religion scholars turned with increasing focus to contemporary and historical aspects of "lived religion." The research areas of the twelve scholars in our study include: Islamic studies, Buddhist studies, Jewish studies, American religious history, early Christian studies, Christian thought, Afro-Caribbean religions, interreligious dialogue, death and dying, fundamentalism, gender and religion, and sports and religion. Although they cited a wide range of theories and methods as part of their work, most of them expressed relatively little attachment to any one theory or method. They understood themselves to be involved in research that crossed disciplinary boundaries, but many were uncomfortable making claims that they felt were beyond their expertise. Though a few scholars drew on theological issues and perspectives, the group as a whole clearly did not identify with theology. The term "theology" is generally understood to encompass training in a particular religious tradition. As one of our interviewees explained, "So I think if you're in a theology department, you're preparing people for the ministry or you're teaching people to teach ministers, so in some way you're part of a Christian or Jewish or Muslim or whatever world." The Temple University Department of Religion is open to studying, teaching, comparing and contrasting all religious traditions and sensibilities.

There was some ambivalence expressed towards theory. One scholar explained that he used few theories but many practical approaches. Another drew a clear line between theory and method, recognizing that he used many different methods but little to no theory. “So I’ll use a social scientific method, but that doesn’t mean I’m necessarily engaging a theory.” The researchers doing history seemed to have the least attachment to theory. One researcher explained that, “historians aren’t as theoretically sophisticated as some other disciplines,” though this individual also acknowledged the influence of Clifford Geertz, Michel Foucault, and Talal Asad. One interviewee who considers theory to be a key component of his scholarship said this about historians: “[they] are generally theory phobic. And they are, to a fault I believe, positivistic.” However, there were many theories cited in our interviews, though no one scholar was committed to a singular theoretical approach. Feminist, black feminist, disability, social constructivist, interpretivist anthropology, literary, sociological, and reception theory were all mentioned. Since so much of modern religious studies is directed at “lived religion,” theories are frequently necessary to communicate and interpret *what it feels like* to practice a religion. As one scholar noted, sources are often lacking or inadequate for subaltern populations. Theory, such as disability, postcolonial, or feminist, can often illuminate the experiences of these individuals and their organizations in ways that primary sources cannot.

Humanistic and social science research methods were described in our interviews. The most common were textual analysis and close reading and a variety of historical methods. Not surprisingly, the biblical scholars read very closely in addition to using sociolinguistic, archaeological, and historical methods to interpret and illuminate their subjects. Other methods included philology, narrative analysis, discourse analysis, oral history, social history, archaeology, critical redaction, sociolinguistics, and cultural studies. One scholar is deeply involved with analyzing textual corpora and digital humanities methods. The social scientific methods employed were qualitative rather than quantitative. Researchers conducted oral histories, ethnographies, and engaged in participant observation, but did not collect numerical data. For the most part, these scholars were involved in traditional humanities research that depended on primary and secondary sources.

Finding Sources and Research Needs

The approach of these religion scholars to finding sources is very idiosyncratic. They certainly appreciate the scope of the resources that the Libraries provide and many commented on the revolutionary transformation that access to electronic journals has brought to their research. The degree to which the Libraries’ website serves as an entry point for research is unclear. *JSTOR* was the database mentioned most frequently, along with the *ATLA Religion Database*, *Project Muse*, *American Periodicals Series Online*, and historical newspapers more generally. A few mentioned the assistance of the religion subject specialist/liaison in providing current awareness alerts or recommending databases, but many more spoke of the value of personal networks and social media in identifying important, interesting, and vetted sources. This latter method is often preferred because the opinion of peers saves time spent wading through an increasingly abundant literature for the most relevant items. When using research databases, one scholar observed that "you get...lots and lots and lots of stuff but then a lot of it actually isn't helpful. So that's, I think, maybe why I tend to rely on the personal connections." Most faculty have developed informal research communities that communicate through venues like Facebook, Twitter, blogs, conferences, listservs, and editorial boards. Scholars embedded in these communities depend on them to stay current, answer queries, and discover sources.

The nature of religious studies research requires a heavy reliance on primary sources and these are discovered and accessed in a variety of ways. The availability of online access to books, journals, magazines, and ephemera has opened many new avenues of research. However, these are predominantly English language sources and generally extend only back to the early modern period. Scholars working with ancient or medieval texts, or non-English sources of more recent origin, do face some real challenges. The services of interlibrary loan and document delivery are essential in many of these circumstances, though faculty members also rely on personal connections to facilitate access. One interviewee described difficulties in obtaining dissertations published in China and Japan, commenting that "...I usually have to ask friends in Asia to help me in getting them somehow." The importance of archivists was emphasized by several religion scholars. One even opined that "archivists are the most important people we have for understanding our species' literate past." However, there was also some frustration in knowing there are many small collections in houses of worship and religious organizations that are still obscure: "...all of a sudden I'll discover that there's like a treasure-trove of things that would've been very helpful to me that someone's holding somewhere that I didn't know about and other people knew about it." This frustration reminds us that an abundance of available online primary sources does not necessarily mean that scholars are finding the *right* sources.

To understand the research needs of faculty it is essential to acknowledge the current environment within which humanities scholars work, where financial resources are scarce and there are increasing time pressures resulting from teaching and administrative duties. The need for research assistants was raised frequently because of limited research time and the growing availability of primary and secondary sources. It takes a focused and knowledgeable individual to search, browse, and filter the available information down to a manageable level. In the not so distant past, this filtering was accomplished by graduate assistants, but funds have dried up for this purpose. The need for research funds to visit archives, attend conferences, and transcribe oral histories was also mentioned. More and better indexing of and search functionality for both primary and secondary sources was noted. While the increasing abundance of sources provides great opportunities, there are still major challenges with regards to discovery, evaluation, and organization.

Data Collection and Storage

The faculty we interviewed had mixed responses to the question of whether their research produces data. Some of them immediately identified with the term data and pointed to specific examples from their work. Others asked for clarification or stated that data was not a term they would typically use to describe the raw output of their research process. Data is an amorphous term that defies easy categorization. However, nearly all researchers ultimately agreed that they produced data in some form.

Faculty who have done ethnographic research easily identified transcripts, audio recordings and field notes as data. One scholar, who is active in digital scholarship, produces GIS datasets. Additionally, scholars referred to their reading notes, textual analysis, and interpretations of sources as research data. One researcher described humanities data as a "chain of interrelated, intertextual conversations that happen with and among scholars." This exemplifies how wide ranging the definition of data can be among humanists, potentially encompassing any content generated during the research process. Storage and preservation of humanities data is then equally complex given the unique forms produced by each researcher.

Book projects typically serve as a higher-level organizational category, with all notes, data, and drafts tied to a particular in-process or completed book. Many of the faculty we interviewed have haphazard storage practices, storing files and documents on personal computers, although a few did mention backing up content to a cloud storage system. Many recognize that their storage practices are lacking. "I need a better system...It's sad that my music is more secure [than my research]." Some faculty maintain printed copies of most of their research materials. Several faculty whose research includes interviews have audio cassettes that have not been duplicated or transferred to a digital format.

Many faculty are struggling to stay organized and keep track of their collected primary and secondary source materials, notes, and drafts. There are a number of reasons for this. Lack of time and research assistants is a significant issue. Some scholars wish they had received training in how to store and manage their research data. One researcher stated, “I had two thousand pages of field notes. How do you process that?” Changing research practices within archives means that scholars now need systems to manage the vast quantities of digital scans they take of archival documents.

Although faculty listed a number of different tools they use to manage, manipulate, and back-up data and research materials, they remained more or less dissatisfied due to the time required to learn to use them and input data. Or they have tried a number of different tools over the years but have not found one they stick with consistently. Identifying yet another “better” tool does not seem like the solution to a faculty member’s organizational challenges.

For long-term preservation, about half of faculty plan to donate their research materials to libraries or archives when they are completely finished with a research project. They intend to share research notes, audio recordings, photographs and other materials with an appropriate archive or cultural institution. One researcher plans to share the digital photos taken of foreign archival materials via an open access digital repository in order to “render them accessible to others.” This raises questions about the faculty’s understanding of collecting policies and practices of archives and the copyright implications of sharing archival content. Another scholar, who is deeply engaged in digital scholarship, views libraries as the natural curators of digital data in the future. This faculty member ultimately intends to store the datasets he is creating with our library to ensure their long-term preservation and accessibility to future researchers.

Considerations when Publishing Research

There are a number of factors faculty consider as they choose a publication outlet for their scholarship, but given the pressures of the tenure and promotion system at Temple University, the most important criterion is the prestige of the press. This generally means a university press, for both journals and monographs, which, according to one scholar, brings “instant credibility.” Reaching a receptive audience is an additional, albeit secondary factor. A scholar says she is “balancing concerns of broader readership of work with merit and promotion considerations.” Another is more direct: “At Temple, I have been informed that for tenure and promotion processes, I need a university press.” Once tenure is achieved publishing possibilities may open up, but the economic incentives for publishing in prestigious presses never entirely disappears because annual merit awards and promotion to full professor follow criteria similar to the tenure process. According to the reward system at Temple University, “If you care about merit points, then you're going to publish, you know, you're going to try to publish in the most prestigious journal, or the journal with the lowest acceptance rate."

Scholars are looking for a good fit between their research, the publication outlet and the audience that publication reaches, or where "the conversation" is taking place. A faculty member explains that, "it just depends on the conversation you're trying to contribute to. And the scope, the scale of what you are doing." Finding the right audience can be particularly challenging for those engaged with interdisciplinary research. One interdisciplinary researcher expressed concern that her work lacked obvious potential peer reviewers, risking delays in publication. Another interviewee spoke of a "bucket list" of journals he wants to publish in. "So for instance, one journal I haven't published in that is on my bucket list, very high, is the *Journal of Religion in Africa* … So I have these objectives. I want to get something in these journals. And then there are journals that I quite frankly have no interest in publishing in. And it's not just a matter of prestige. It's a matter of the kinds of conversations that are promoted by these journals that I partake in." Beyond the traditional scholarly venues, trade presses, religious publishing houses, and prestigious magazines like the *New Yorker* or *Atlantic* were mentioned. The research these scholars do crosses many boundaries and the most appropriate audience is not always an academic one: "So if it's something to do with Catholic reform, well I might go look at Paulist Press and that sort of thing. A Catholic press is more likely to be interested in that sort of thing." While the Paulist Press has a very good reputation, it does not carry the gravitas of a university press in the academic reward system.

Beyond prestige and audience, there are other important considerations faculty take into account when selecting a press. For those on the tenure clock, the length of the peer review period and the time between contract signing and publication is important. A perceived downside of more prestigious presses is the more lengthy turnaround times. "If something has the lowest acceptance rate your likelihood of getting published in it is much lower. So it just means that you spend half your time revising and resubmitting and reassembling sometimes." Nevertheless, the difficult work of revisions with a good editor is highly valued and scholars will often choose presses in order to work with particular editors. Another researcher suggests that online publications offer speedier resolution of the acceptance decision, allowing more time to search for alternative publishers if rejected.

Effective sales and marketing increase a book's visibility and possibility of success, so authors also think carefully about what a publisher does after a book has been released. A researcher asks of a press, "Are they going to be aggressive and creative in marketing my book?"

Increasingly, publishers may encourage or even require authors to blog about their book as part of the marketing plan.

Despite little economic incentive, several interviewees discussed their participation in social media, particularly blogging, as a means of reaching broader audiences on important issues related to religion. Characterizing this as her "other life" – the life outside academia – one scholar explained that "…public intellectual seems like such a glorified term for what I do, but I do try to write in places that will be read by a general audience." *Religion Dispatches* was mentioned several times as an excellent blog for scholarly commentary and book reviews. Hosted by the University of Southern California's Annenberg School, it describes itself as an "intersection of religion, politics and culture."

Other researchers were less enthusiastic about blogging, seeing it as either fraught with risk or not worth the time and effort. One scholar who "likes blogs" expressed anxiety about "the idea of research being out there and drawing responses from larger audiences," especially from a potentially "hostile public." He goes on to say that the topics he writes about elicit strong feelings and he has "seen colleagues be attacked on social media. And it's scary for me and that just doesn't happen when you publish in journals, you don't get attacked and misrepresented." Another scholar limits his professional focus on the scholarly community: "If it's not refereed, I don't read it. I don't read blogs."

Perceptions of Open Access

In talking with faculty members, it became clear that there is not a universally understood definition of open access. Although several had published in open access, peer-reviewed publications - *Journal of Global Buddhism*, *Journal of Religion and Society*, *Lingua Sinica*, and *Conversations* (from Yale's MAVCOR Center) – most had not actively sought out open access publishing opportunities. In fact, most do not appear to understand the basic characteristics of scholarly open access and might have difficulty identifying such opportunities.

Although a robust ecosystem for open access journals has developed in the early years of the 21st century, with a wide variety of publication models, religion faculty members primarily understand open access journals through the prism of traditional subscription journals. Some have published with journals that allowed temporary free access to their articles prior to official publication and were supportive of this. Another has tried to negotiate with subscription-based publishers for the right to make her work open access, finding the process to be extremely laborious and convoluted. “Open access really meant signing my life away more or less...they make it really hard for you to go open access if you publish in traditional places.” Another faculty member sought to protect the rights to his work by crossing out restrictive clauses before signing a contract. Several faculty make their work available via Academia.edu or other academic social media sites without negotiating rights beforehand, despite some concerns about sharing their work in this way.

Overall, faculty support the idea of open access and believe that freely available scholarly content is a good thing. One scholar’s ideal would be to have “all printed publications available free of charge to everybody in the world.” However, there are a number of reasons they are are ambivalent about publishing in open access venues. As noted above, they need to publish in prestigious journals for tenure and promotion. According to one researcher “unless the things we’re doing count, I don’t see a lot of people doing things other than traditional scholarship in traditional print venues.” There are also lingering questions and skepticism about the reputation, respectability, and quality of open access publications, even if an open access journal is refereed. Maintaining the peer-review process is extremely important to faculty. Yet the one faculty member who has published extensively in open access publications disputed the notion that these publications are less rigorous. He explained that “because they have to establish a reputation, [open access journals] actually have a stronger, more fierce, peer-review process than more established journals.” This view was unique among the faculty we interviewed.

Keeping Up with Trends

Conference attendance is the most frequently cited means of staying current with developments in religious studies. Many scholars referred to the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting as their conference of choice, where they become aware of new trends and meet colleagues from other institutions. A senior scholar explained that the role of conferences changes as one’s career advances. For graduate students conferences offer an introduction to scholarly culture and a good environment for fleshing out new ideas not quite “ready for public consumption.” Over a career, however, socializing and networking become more important than the formal scholarly aspects of these gatherings.

In terms of current awareness, conference papers are often more useful than journal articles because they make research available more quickly. Faculty mentioned scanning the conference abstracts to get a snapshot of new approaches, discoveries, and research areas. Publisher book displays on the trade floor of conferences offer opportunities for understanding publishing trends and speaking to press representatives. Serving on conference committees or as program unit chairs is also valued as it allows scholars to work closely with faculty outside their home institution in reviewing paper proposals and planning panel discussions. Service on editorial boards of university presses also functions as a means of current awareness.

Closer to home, several of our interviewees credited their subject specialist/liaison librarian with providing regular updates on new materials. Departmental colleagues and graduate students play an additional role in keeping current with new trends and approaches.

Social media has significantly expanded the reach of scholarly networks, as scholars can now participate in many more conversations among themselves and beyond academia with the general public. Facebook and Twitter were the two most frequently cited forms of social media. Facebook was described as a dense web of scholarly networks consisting of academic contacts developed throughout one's career and a fertile ground for discovery of new and relevant research materials. One scholar explained that "seeing what people are posting in the different groups related to learned societies is a very helpful barometer for determining what conversations are happening and what conversations are problematic." Twitter was likened to a "faculty lounge" that offered the "water cooler moment", where colleagues gather to discuss current research topics and share news. One faculty member believes that Twitter is a powerful tool for spreading discoveries: "On Twitter right now, somebody can discover an inscription that makes mention of a term or an idea that offers tremendous clarity for an issue and within a day everybody knows about it. So it's a much different way of disseminating information and researchers need to start using it more often, I think."

This non-vetted dissemination of information is not without its drawbacks, however. According to one scholar, social media has displaced conferences as the initial place for bringing scholarly discoveries and findings to light, which means that complex issues are shared with the public before researchers have even formed a preliminary consensus. It works this way:

> "…when something like that is discovered…the first thing that happens is somebody writes an article about it or writes a write up about it that goes onto social media and they establish a Facebook page for it and then Gawker or Buzzfeed or CNN blog gets a hold of it, then that makes the rounds on social media. And then eventually somebody writes a blog post about it. And all this is going on while people are also studying it, but in terms of like getting people to know about it, conferences aren't the outlet for that anymore, at least not the way they used to be."

As the same scholar explains, "…[the] drawback of the old way of doing it is that it took a while for the ideas to get out there, but by the time the ideas got out there, they had been sussed out, they had been parsed, they had been evaluated, there had been major discussions among people who have credentials.”

Additional reservations were expressed about social media including compromises to privacy and the potential for criticism and attacks from the online public. One scholar suggested that using social media was like permanently placing postcards on the wall of city hall. Another acknowledged that many topics on religion are controversial and can inspire strong reactions from people outside the academic community. Finally, scholars are hard-pressed for time and and the kind of impact garnered by social media attention does not figure very highly in the tenure process.

Implications for Library Services

Given the interdisciplinary nature of religious studies, scholars are exposed to a rich mixture of ideas and approaches in any research project they undertake. Perhaps for this reason, few faculty members single-mindedly pursue what one might describe as a research program throughout their careers. Instead, they change directions, explore different historical periods and geographic regions, and adopt new methodologies. An experienced research librarian plays an important role here, recommending the appropriate databases, suggesting search strategies, and providing current awareness updates.

Several scholars commented enthusiastically about the growth in the Libraries’ general collections in the first decade of this century. Although monograph acquisitions have leveled off in recent years, our interviewees appreciate the depth and breadth of our collection of books, journals, and newspapers. However, there is a wide recognition that Temple’s local collection cannot support all of their research, especially primary source research, where faculty needs are quite specialized. These scholars depend on detailed finding aids for archival sources. One scholar expressed concern that indexing and access to archival collections of religious tracts were not more readily available. Specialized digitized primary sources such as this, when available, are likely to be costly for libraries to purchase or license. Seamless and efficient access to external collections through document delivery and interlibrary loan continue to be an essential support service.

Given their long experience with archival sources, many of these researchers express an interest in preserving their research materials for the long-term in an archive, whether at Temple University or elsewhere. But scholars rarely have a systematic strategy for organizing and storing data and research materials that makes long-term preservation more likely. Here is an opportunity for early conversations about organizing and preserving research, including discussions of collection policies and the preservation and organizational requirements of special collection departments. Unlike researchers in the federally funded sciences, humanities scholars are not required to make their raw data files publically accessible. Nonetheless, these scholars do see value in making their research and accompanying data available to others and look to the library to support this effort.

Currently, the one faculty member who is generating datasets as part of his research is eager to see the library play a crucial role in the technical support and preservation of digital projects. As the library develops its capacity in this area, we anticipate new services to emerge as a result of increasing faculty demand. Librarians who are knowledgeable about research data management and the tools of digital scholarship will play a key role in supporting faculty.

The publishing landscape is evolving rapidly and scholars have many more choices for either publishing their work or sharing knowledge in informal settings. A better understanding of open access, licensing, and author rights will allow faculty to take full advantage of these opportunities. In order to promote rich conversations about these choices, librarians must first educate themselves. As the library increases its scholarly communication outreach efforts through workshops, formal programming, and one-on-one interactions, partnerships with the Temple University Press will be an important component of these initiatives.

The Temple University Libraries and academic libraries in general are strong advocates and supporters of open access publishing. However, librarians need to be sensitive to the institutional pressures that faculty face in the areas of tenure, promotion, and merit-based pay increases. The current academic reward system prioritizes selecting a publisher based on prestige and frequently on the speed of publication. In contrast to the sciences and social sciences, concerns about metrics related to citation count or social media impact were less evident in faculty decision-making. Selecting the correct target audience is very important. One inference we draw from our interviews is that faculty perceive open access publications as offering no meaningfully defined audience. It is easy to imagine the open web as a vast ocean of undifferentiated content. Traditional publishing serves as a locus of attention, a node on a network, in which a definable audience can be imagined. This is an area where education may come into play. As our outreach efforts foster a greater awareness of the open access institutional structures that promote discoverability and coherent research communities these options may become more attractive.

Finally, for librarians who are so inclined, we encourage them to use social media to follow academic groups and individuals in their subject areas. This suggestion is not about actively participating or advocating library services - which might be considered intrusive - but about paying attention to disciplinary conversations. As we have learned from this project, quietly listening offers an increased awareness and a deeper understanding of the scholars we aim to support.

Final Thoughts

This Religious Studies Scholarship project has been informative to us on many levels. We spoke with members of an academic department with whom our subject specialist/liaison has a close relationship, due to the small department size, deep expertise of the librarian, and his considerable outreach efforts over many years. Three additional librarians participated in the project, contributing skills and insights from their own areas of expertise. In the process, they gained valuable knowledge about a discipline previously unfamiliar to them. This “ethnographic” method of learning from faculty, in which librarians listen rather than advocate, offered us new and different insights into the perceptions of our users. It deepened our understanding of the many challenges scholars face in conducting research and establishing a secure place in the academic world. In gratitude for the generous time and information faculty shared with us, we intend to use what we’ve learned to enhance our capacity for supporting their research needs here at Temple University Libraries.

Appendix: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Research focus

1. Describe your current research focus and how this focus is situated within the broader religious studies discipline and the academy more broadly.[Probe for specific religions studied and whether/not they see themselves as located firmly within religious studies as a discipline or located across/between disciplines]

2. How would you characterize your study of religion? [Prompt, i.e. humanistic, critical, religious]

Research methods

3. What research methods do you currently use to conduct your research (i.e. discourse analysis, historical analysis, etc.)? What kinds of data does your research typically elicit?

4. How do you locate the primary and/or secondary source materials you use in your research?

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

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

Dissemination Practices

7. Where do you typically publish your research in terms of the kinds of publications and disciplines? How do your publishing practices relate to those typical to your discipline?

8. Have you ever deposited your data or final research products in a repository?

a. If so, which repositories and what has been your motivations for depositing? (i.e. required, for sharing, investment in open access principles)

b. If no, why not?

Future and State of the Field

9. What future challenges and opportunities do you see for the broader field of religious studies?

10. If I gave you a magic wand that could help you with your research and publication process – what would you ask it to do?

Follow-up

11. Is there anything else about your experiences as a religious study scholar and/or the religious studies discipline that you think it is important for me to know that was not covered in the previous questions?