Investigating the Needs of Religious Studies Scholars:
A MULTI-INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATIVE APPROACH
AGENDA

1. Meta-theoretical underpinnings
2. Introduction to the Research Support Services program
3. Overview of the Religious Studies Project
4. Preliminary insights
RESEARCH SUPPORT SERVICES PROGRAM

Danielle Cooper
» Analyst, Ithaka S+R
  » Coordinator, Research Support Services Program
» MI, University of Toronto
» PhD Candidate, York University
» Research focus:
  » Ethnographic methods in libraries and archives
  » Information activity beyond institutional contexts
META-THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Scholar as information-seeker

» Researchers have different needs and behaviors associated with searching information for their research and this varies by discipline (Gannon-Leary et al. 2007, Hemminger et al. 2007, Herman 2001, Schonfeld and Guthrie 2007, Sheeja 2010 and Tennant and Cataldo 2002).

Role of library research

» In order to attend to researchers, information spaces and services must be designed in ways that take these researchers’ information needs and behaviors into account (Hepworth 2004 and Spink et al. 2007)

» Qualitative library research should not only be applied on a smaller scale to solve institution-specific problems but also be designed towards more sustained and open forms of exploration that incorporates collaboration with and comparison between libraries (e.g. Lanclos and Asher, 2016)
An ongoing program to examine the research support needs of scholars by discipline

Previous studies:
- History (Schonfeld and Rutner 2012)
- Chemistry (Schonfeld and Long 2013)
- Art History (Schonfeld and Long 2014)

Current studies:
- Religious Studies (launched January 2016)
- Agriculture (launched April 2016)
- Public Health (launched October 2016)
Ithaka S+R partners with 7-20 academic libraries who assemble research teams with 1-4 members

- Ithaka S+R designs research instruments and assembles an advisory committee to help guide the project
- Research teams attend a methods workshop hosted by Ithaka S+R to launch project
Each research team conducts research on about 15 scholars at their own institution

- Semi-structured interviews focused on the full research life-cycle (e.g. research methods, information management, publishing)
- Photography

Who are scholars for the purpose of this project?

- Tenure track faculty or personnel who regularly conduct research as part of their work
- Out of scope: graduate students, adjunct faculty or personnel who do not regularly conduct research
The study results in two project outputs:

- Each research team writes a report on their local findings, which may be made publically available.
- Ithaka S+R takes a sample of the information collected across the participating institutions and writes a capstone report made publically available.

Findings from the study are also used as the basis for further research and future outputs.
RELIGIOUS STUDIES

KEY ISSUES

Changes in religious studies
» Mixed methods and interdisciplinary approaches
» Digital technologies and social media
» How to define “religious studies”
  » The relationship between theology studies and religious studies
  » Traditionally humanistic, ethnography increasingly popular
RELIGIOUS STUDIES

KEY ISSUES

*Shifts in the academy and public sphere*

» Decline of the humanities
» Vulnerability of small private colleges
» Public perception of religion
» Emerging social movements

*Information-specific issues*

» Open-access
» Budget cuts to library and archives collections
» Decrease in monograph publishers
» Increasing reliance on digital collections
RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Sponsors
- American Theological Library Association (ATLA)
- Society of Biblical Literature (SBL)
- American Academy of Religion (AAR)

Participants
1. Baylor University
2. Concordia Theological Seminary
3. Emory University
4. Luther Seminary
5. Naropa University
6. Rice University
7. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
8. University of Notre Dame
9. Vanderbilt University
10. Asbury Seminary
11. Brigham Young University
12. Columbia University
13. Harvard University
14. Jewish Theological Seminary of America
15. Princeton Theological Seminary
16. Temple University
17. Tufts University
18. Yale University
RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Project next steps
» Participants making reports publically available (November 2016)
» Ithaka S+R finalizing capstone report (November-December 2016)
» Final report launched with links to publically available local reports (January 2017)

Findings to watch
» Scholar as collector
» Digital research ubiquitous but minimal attention to digital research methodologies
» Lack of awareness of/participation in open access
RESEARCH SUPPORT SERVICES PROGRAM

Challenges
» Coordinating with a large group of participants across multiple institutions
» Striking balance between local and collaborative research aims

Key benefits
» This project’s qualitative approach is a unique way to:
  » Develop relationships between librarians, scholars and other disciplinary constituents
  » Provide new opportunities for information professionals to develop their qualitative research skills
  » Capture the practices and needs of researchers collaboratively and cross-institutionally


(continued)


