



# AAR Statement on Evaluating Scholarship in Religious Studies for Promotion and Tenure

In keeping with other organizations of the American Council of Learned Societies, the AAR accepts its responsibility to support its members in professional development by establishing a clear statement on scholarship as it relates to promotion and tenure in Religious Studies. Acting on the importance of developing timely and accurate standards to assess new and evolving academic platforms, the AAR intends to provide ongoing revision of these guidelines as warranted.

The AAR appreciates that by setting forth these standards, it is promoting a serious reconsideration of scholarship and scholarly inquiry that will have ramifications for the conduct of academic institutions. The AAR remains committed to the production of new knowledge as the foundation of scholarship. We encourage AAR members—institutional and individual—to acknowledge that the rapidly changing economics of academic publishing and changes in the nature of in faculty work in higher education are challenging the effectiveness of traditional standards for evaluating the nature of scholarly work in the promotion and tenure process. As the use of term and contingent faculty labor grows, the system of tenure and promotion also becomes more contested; publishing standards related to promotion should take these changes and specific institutional contexts into account. AAR members deserve support in clarifying current standards for promotion and tenure that are situated among and responsive to these larger systemic developments and emerging platforms.

In order to encourage our member institutions to proceed fairly, we recommend that they adopt as many of the following standards as are apposite in their respective institutions when evaluating their faculty in Religious Studies for promotion and tenure:

1. Evaluating bodies should distinguish publishing standards among different types of institutions, and recognize that the importance of and criteria for research publication for tenure varies significantly by type, size, location, demographic, and mission of each institution.
2. At all steps in the evaluation process, institutions should develop clear guidelines, transparent processes, and effective mentoring for probationary faculty facing tenure and promotion, and pay particular attention to questions of equity and inclusion. This clarity will help to promote academic success.

3. Institutions should recognize the wide-array of subdisciplines in Religious Studies. Evaluations of scholarship should be made by the criteria appropriate to the scholarly subdiscipline. Taking difference between subdisciplines seriously entails:
  - Recognition that not all subfields produce the same kinds of scholarship, nor is the scholarly monograph the principal product of all subdisciplines;
  - Reaffirmation of core standards that apply to recognizing and evaluating scholarship in specific subfields as independent from its manner of delivery;
  - Heeding the guidance of external scholarly resources so that evaluation committees can benefit from AAR experts in subfields not represented on promotion and tenure committees. This added expertise will help to insure the faculty candidate's scholarship is evaluated fairly.
4. In the evaluation process, scholarly evaluators should acknowledge that digital and electronic platforms for scholarly production are both legitimate and long-lasting. Scholarship that puts traditional methods and media of presentation into conversation with those methods and media that re-conceptualize religious studies merits attention.
5. Institutions will vary in what they value in scholarship. We encourage institutions and departments to broaden the concept of scholarship so that it is not equated solely and unequivocally with written publication. We also encourage institutions to consider activities that might have traditionally been considered service, but do contribute to the creation of new knowledge, such as editorial work, translations, bibliographies, textbooks, essays, pedagogical writings, and even exceptional teaching in nontraditional contexts like immersions and field study. Scholars who interpret religious cultures for civic benefit and the public good should also be recognized as participating in scholarly activity.

In particular, we urge institutions to consider the additional demands on minoritized scholars such as guild and institutional representation, supplemental mentorship and teaching, and the work of cultural translation. We urge institutions to consider all these elements not merely through the lens of [cultural taxation](#), but also as unique assets that must be recognized, weighted and institutionally and professionally rewarded. Such scholarship involving outreach, work in non-university communities and work associated with program

administration, grant writing, research related to assessment, and collaborative engagement can be evaluated to count for research.

6. Given that many graduate students begin their professional dossier in graduate school, we suggest that graduate programs re-examine the role of the dissertation as the sole criteria for evaluation in the graduate curriculum. Outside of the graduate program's traditional requirements, we encourage graduate programs to advise students to present their scholarship in forms that promote more rapid conversion of their work into publishable form. We also encourage graduate programs to guide students in their selection of publication venues so that their first publications have value and weight in their relevant fields.
7. Institutions and departments should actively and regularly re-assess the evolving platforms that intellectual work can take. Some may reconsider the notion of a book as the gold standard for scholarly recognition.
8. We encourage institutions to develop nomenclature and standards for professional advancement and promotion in non-tenure-track positions.

## References

Canton, Cecil. "The 'Cultural Taxation' of Faculty of Color in the Academy." *California Faculty Magazine*, Fall 2013. <https://www.calfac.org/magazine-article/cultural-taxation-faculty-color-academy>.

See also AAR's Guidelines for Evaluating Digital Scholarship

### Authored by:

Kimberly Connor, University of San Francisco

Willie Jennings, Yale Divinity School

Gary Laderman, Emory University

Kathryn Lofton, Yale University

Laurie Patton, Middlebury College

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