

Graduate Survey of Religion and Theology Programs

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THROUGHOUT THE FALL OF 2000, over 1000 department chairs and other program heads received a survey of undergraduate departments and programs in religious studies, theology, Bible, and sacred texts. This Survey of Religion and Theology Programs sought to map comprehensively the academic study of religion (religious studies, theology, Bible, and sacred texts) in the US and Canada. It was the signature program of the Lilly Endowment funded *Strengthening College and University Programs in Religion and Theology (SCURT) initiative*.

This fall, in the next phase of the AAR's initiative, we will conduct a Graduate Survey of all fully accredited colleges, universities, and seminaries in the United States and Canada that offer academic doctoral degrees in religion or theology, such as the Ph.D., Th. D., and S.T.D. The intent of the survey is to poll those institutions preparing candidates for the terminal degree necessary for their professional careers as scholars and academics. For this reason, we will only survey the academic doctoral programs, rather than professional doctoral programs such as the D.Min. We may survey Masters level programs in the future.

Taken together, the undergraduate and graduate surveys will provide data for all those interested in the future development of the profession. With the support of the Lilly Endowment and the endorsement of major societies in the study of religion, we can address effectively the need for accurate, reliable, and useful information. We intend to collect data from every identified academic unit in which the study of religion is a central focus. Once this data is gathered, we will share it with you and your colleagues for your strategic decisions.

As we have long known and as reviews of the web sites of the major graduate programs in religion make even clearer, there is little consensus about how the graduate study of religion is understood or taxonomized, its boundaries and foci, or anything approaching a standard or typical conception of the field. On the other hand, as we have prepared the survey it has become apparent that the results we receive will only be as helpful as the data we request. We have prepared the survey instrument in such a way that the results will be understandable and comparable across institutions.

To assist us in the creation of the survey instrument, a Council on Graduate Studies in Religion advisory group, chaired by Steve Tipton of Emory University and composed of Elizabeth A. Clark (Duke University), Richard A. Rosengarten (University of Chicago Divinity School), John Clayton (Boston University), and Alan Segal (Barnard College), and five consultants, Mark Chaves (University of Arizona), Shelia Mann (American Political Science Association), Randi Warne (University of Alberta), Mark N. Wilhelm (Auburn Theological Seminary), and Charles Willard (Association of Theological Schools in the US and Canada) have worked during the winter and spring on the instrument itself, in order to garner as much helpful information as possible. They have compared surveys from the American Historical Association, the American Philosophical Association, and the Modern Language Association in an attempt to see how other constituent members of the American Council of Learned Societies have surveyed their members.

The group has spent considerable time with the issue of how the field's disciplines

are divided, laid out, and approached. Our graduate institutions structure their programs and their graduates seek faculty positions in specific contexts (typically, departments of religion or seminaries). These advertised positions tend to be identified in certain traditional ways. In reviewing the web sites of over 100 departments that offer academic doctoral degrees, it became apparent that the problem of taxonomy is just as much a problem for departments as it is for us in our survey.

So, how shall we survey the graduate study of religion? We think we need to do it in a way that is both ordered and capacious. While we know at the outset that whatever we do will not work well for some programs, we also know that sub-fields or areas of concentration must be delineated in such a way as to will minimize problems and maximize useful information gathering. There is some comfort in realizing that we are providing a taxonomy, not writing a constitution. In other words, we are asking for the respondents to self-select which category on the survey best describes the program that their institution delivers. The categorization of the field that you will see in the survey instrument is not, then, a proposal for how the field should be classified. It is, rather, our attempt to describe what we have found on over 100 institutional web sites.

The Survey has as many forced responses as possible, minimizing the need for writing in comments and thereby maximizing the ability to compare responses statistically. We have grouped the questions into categories:

- General information about the instructional program and the department

- Student recruitment and admission; their course of study: curricula, exams, dissertation, and teaching; doctoral students as teachers; student funding and financial support; completion and attrition patterns; placement and employment
- Faculty

The AAR has retained Dr. Richard Rubinson, Professor of Sociology at Emory University (Ph.D., Stanford University, 1974) and a distinguished scholar of American education to gather and analyze the survey data. He is the author of "The Sociology of Educational Expansion," *Sociology of Education* (1999); "Education and the Economy" (co-author) in *The Handbook of Economic Sociology* (1995); *The Political Construction of Education*, (editor, Praeger 1991); and "Class Formation, Political Organization, and Institutions," *American Journal of Sociology*, (1986).

In the fall of 2002, approximately 100 departments in the United States and Canada will receive a packet containing the survey itself. We had a very encouraging response rate on the undergraduate survey and are expecting the same level of participation for the graduate survey. We urge all recipients of the graduate survey to take the time to fill out the information and return it. By participating, you will help your department as well as the field. Your responses, of course, will be *strictly confidential*. The more information that can be gathered about the graduate study of religion in the US and Canada, the better able we will be to provide discipline-wide information that will help promote and advance the academic study of religion. ♣

From the Student Desk Mere Mime

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MY SKIN had traces of a mime's "white face," my lips were stained with red, and my black costume was moist from the exertion of a dance. I was a simple mime surrounded by a table full of pastors, scholars, and authors talking about their achievements—one could say even boasting. Amongst their banter, they politely complimented my show and then relegated me to the realm of mere "entertainment." As a mime, it was typical to be marginalized.

Laughter echoed in the room as they talked about this and that paper, books published and their scholarly achievements. With mirth, one looked at me and asked what I was doing these days (I could feel an invisible hand patting my head). I answered, "Studying for my Ph.D." The table talk stopped as their minds processed the thought: "mime and a Ph.D." They looked at me with an expression of bewilderment, as their thoughts failed to make the connection, wrestling with the phantom incongruity. They accepted me as a Marceau trained mime artist, even an excel-

lent one; however, I was still a mere mime, voiceless. A mime getting a Ph.D. seemed out of place. Their minds leaked through their gestures and I easily read their question: "Is a mime with a brain an oxymoron?" They saw art as being for expressive, emotional, and radically creative minds, minds that reject academic pursuits and ministerial sobriety.

As a mime, I have encountered these looks and comments time and time again, on various levels. Pastors send mimes to the children's church, and theologians find ministry in Hollywood's films. Broadway is sought out for leadership in performance, while the Church's artists are often driven away.

I fear performing arts, theology, and academia have been estranged in many people's minds. Art has become a thing of "entertainment," an escape, rather than a source for deep reflection and theology. The performing arts today are enmeshed in the greater culture of our society, yet they are alienated from the sub-culture of the church. What has happened to the artist-philosopher and teacher who, like Plato, teaches in story? What has happened to the artist-prophet and minister like Ezekiel, John, and Jesus, whose symbols and gestures still speak to the

nations? What will happen to the performing arts in the academy? Will they be marginalized, only existing as part of the entertainment, or limited to classifications of low and high culture? This was my question at my first AAR Annual Meeting. It is a question I am still asking.

Many people reflect on movies, many admire the dancer's skill, but do they expect the dancer to be an academic, theologian, or the actor-prophet? No, not normally, because most dancers are not theologians or academics. The reason seems to be understandable enough; dancers must spend too much time in training to have time for theology and academics. However, this is a cultural stereotype, a marginalizing standard many have projected onto the performing artist. Neither theologian nor scholar can deny the artistic skill of Plato, nor can any pastor deny the ministry of Ezekiel or the artistic talents displayed by David. However, many Christians have failed the Christian performing artists of our own generation: have failed to call them to a higher expectation. Intellectual excellence – to ministry and even to the highest standards of skill – is absent in the arts of religion in our age.

Now universities and seminaries are awakening to these questions and are beginning to include the arts in their curriculum. Places like St. Andrews, Princeton, and Fuller Theological Seminary have begun new programs for aspects of arts in the Christian faith. The

challenge they face is how to reintegrate arts into the academy. This is the challenge I propose to the fellowship of the AAR. To what sphere do we relegate the performing arts? Are they isolated to only one world, requiring a choice between entertainment, academia, and ministry? Is God hidden in the art, only speaking from the shadows? Will the voice of God ever again be as clear and loud as when mimed by the prophet? Will the philosopher artist once again roam our university halls? Could we dare to believe in a time when watching a performer will strip us of our defenses, reduce us to tears and, in conversation, boggle the greatest minds?

As I started my journey into the Ph.D. program at Fuller Theological Seminary, I pondered these questions, as perhaps did my professors. I held my breath waiting for my first grades, and let out a sigh when they affirmed that I belonged in the program. I have been encouraged to attend AAR-sponsored activities by many people in the Ph.D. program at Fuller. I was encouraged when I saw film and fine arts addressed at AAR conferences, yet the dramatic and performing arts seem only to speak from the shadows.

Now, I am asked to come to the tables of the AAR, to sit with another group of scholars, and I hold my breath. Will they marginalize artists and look at us as mere entertainment, or will they help us become more than just mere mimes? ♣