

# AAR Surveys of Religion and Theology Programs in the U.S.: Numbers Count

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**O**VER THE PAST THREE years the Academy has undertaken two large-scale surveys of the academic study of religion, one at the undergraduate level and one at the doctoral level. The data that we have collected and analyzed will serve as the foundation of our continuing efforts to ensure that local and national leaders have the information they need to (1) assess the state of the field; (2) analyze established patterns and emerging trends; and (3) secure the future of the field through strategic decision making based on accurate, comprehensive, and reliable information.

## *Undergraduate Departments of Religion and Theology in the U.S. and Canada*

From September 2000 to April 2001, over eleven hundred department chairs and program heads in religion and theology at fully accredited colleges and universities across North America received the AAR's Census of Religion and Theology Programs, which was supported by a grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc. This census mapped comprehensively the undergraduate academic study of religion in the U.S. and Canada. It was the signature program of the

Lilly Endowment-funded *Strengthening College and University Programs in Religion and Theology (SCURT)* initiative. (More information on this census can be found at: [www.aarweb.org/department/RSNAARcensus.pdf](http://www.aarweb.org/department/RSNAARcensus.pdf).) The preliminary results of this large-scale census, with nearly nine hundred programs responding, were published in the Fall 2001 issue of *Religious Studies News* — *AAR Edition*.

Additional presentations of the preliminary results were made at a Special Topics Forum at the 2001 Annual Meeting. The Special Topics Forum included a report on what had been learned from the census about programs, faculty, and enrollments at the undergraduate level; a summary of the thirty-seven-item research design and the data collection strategies deployed; reflections on what the data reveal about the state of the field; and a discussion of measures needed for filling lacunae in our knowledge. Panelists included Edward R. Gray, American Academy of Religion; Lance Selfa, National Opinion Research Center; Jonathan Z. Smith, University of Chicago; and Linell E. Cady, Arizona State University. Additional presentations were made to several regional groups in the spring of 2002.

With the core findings of this census having been published, we realized a need for a considerable amount of relational data analysis. In the spring of 2003 we commissioned an Emory University statistical ana-

lyst to conduct a second phase of analysis of the data. In this round of analyses we sought out various relationships by affiliation (particularly information regarding adjunct faculty and women in the profession) and aggregate numbers regarding religion majors, courses, departmental characteristics, and enrollment. The results of this analysis will be the focus of a Special Topics Forum at the 2003 Annual Meeting and at a special forum held in Atlanta in early October (see below). The full data analyses of the undergraduate census (without any institutions being identified) will eventually be posted on the AAR Web site so that interested parties can review the data for their own purposes.

## *Graduate Departments of Religion and Theology in the U.S.*

In the next phase of the AAR's initiative, we conducted a survey of all fully accredited colleges, universities, and seminaries in the United States which offer academic doctoral degrees in religion or theology, such as the Ph.D., Th.D., S.T.D., and D.H.L. The intent of the survey, conducted in the fall of 2002, was to poll those institutions that prepare candidates for the terminal degree necessary for their professional careers as academicians and scholars, hence we only surveyed the *academic* doctoral programs (rather than professional doctoral programs such as D.Min. programs). We received a very encouraging response rate, with sixty-two of eighty-seven institutions participating. In the near future we will be conducting yet another survey, this time of terminal masters-level programs in the U.S.

The 210-item Graduate Survey garnered information regarding:

- General information about the instructional program; number of applications and percent admitted
- 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: number tenured, ranks, and salary
- Departmental resources

We have retained Richard Rubinson, Professor of Sociology and Interim Associate Dean of the Graduate School at Emory University (Ph.D., Stanford University, 1974) to gather and analyze the survey data, to do a causal-comparative analysis, and to derive correlations of the quantitative data. He is the author of "The Sociology of Educational Expansion," *Sociology of Education* (1999) and "Class Formation, Political Organization, and Institutions," *American Journal of Sociology* (1986); co-author of "Education and the Economy," *Handbook of Economic Sociology* (1995); and editor of *The Political Construction of Education* (Praeger, 1991).

## *Combined Results Analyzed*

As the capstone of these two surveys, we are gathering a small group of distinguished individuals in the field, as well as in higher education, who will meet for a daylong discussion on October 4 in Atlanta. The meeting will examine the core questions and issues that are faced by departments and

programs and that need to be addressed as they promote and advance the academic study of religion in the U.S. and Canada. The results of this discussion will assist us as we prepare future studies and surveys of the field.

At a Special Topics Forum at the 2003 Annual Meeting we will present the preliminary results of the data analysis of the Graduate Survey as well as further analysis of the data that has been collected in our undergraduate census. The meeting is entitled "Numbers Count: Gathering, Managing, and Using Census Data in a Program Review and Enhancement" (A229). An accompanying slide show will demonstrate how to use comparable data to help review a given department or program and compare it with similar ones among the nearly nine hundred undergraduate departments and sixty-two doctoral programs that reported. There will also be a presentation on gathering, managing, and using data in a program review. The panelists include Terrence W. Tilley of the University of Dayton and Carey J. Gifford of the American Academy of Religion.

Taken together, these two surveys of the demography, students, faculty, and programs of the undergraduate and graduate study of religion will provide invaluable data for all those interested in the contemporary state of the field and its future development. The surveys have provided a plethora of information regarding the types and number of courses offered at the undergraduate level, the number and types of fields of concentration being studied at the graduate level, and faculty tenure and salaries — to name only a few of the hundreds of categories of data.

The Academy's overarching intention is to collect and analyze longitudinal data from undergraduate and graduate academic units with the purpose of identifying and publishing trends. When both data collections have been fully analyzed, and as we continue to do further data collections on a regular basis, we will see what trends can be identified. Such trends will assist in developing effective plans and programs to improve the field. They will also provide a base for future longitudinal surveys. With this type of historical knowledge, the academic study of religion will be better equipped to understand itself and to present its case. With the support of the Lilly Endowment, Inc. and the endorsement of major societies in the study of religion, we can now begin to effectively use this accurate, reliable, and useful information. ■

The Committee on Teaching and Learning seeks nominations for the 2004 AAR Award for Excellence in Teaching.

Nominations of winners of campus awards, or any other awards, are encouraged.

Procedures for the nomination process are outlined on the AAR Web site at [www.aarweb.org/awards/teaching.asp](http://www.aarweb.org/awards/teaching.asp).