

The data collection and analysis period for the Census of Departments and Programs in Religion and Theology has been completed. Nearly 900 departments and programs in the US and Canada participated in the effort to capture critically needed information about the undergraduate curriculum, faculty, and enrollments in religion. The Census is the signature program of the Lilly Endowment funded *Strengthening College and University Programs in Religion and Theology* (SCURT) initiative. It has operated with the cooperation of other major societies in the study of religion.

## RELIGION & THEOLOGY PROGRAMS CENSUS "THE STUDY OF RELIGION COUNTS"

### What we have learned from the Census of Religion and Theology programs

Edward R. Gray, AAR Director of Academic Relations

**W**HAT HAVE WE LEARNED from this effort involving all accredited institutions of higher education in the US and Canada? The short answer is, "a lot." Our knowledge of the field has grown exponentially from the outset of this project a year ago. Then, I could not have provided with confidence the number of programs in religion. It is not that we did not have any sense of the size of the field, but rather, that we had no reliable, updated database against which to test that sense. Now, thanks to the cooperation of nearly 900 department chairs and program unit heads across the US and Canada, we can begin to answer some key questions about the undergraduate study of religion and theology. Already, the census data has been used to provide basic contact information on all undergraduate programs in religion and theology known to us. (See the *Find Religion* page of the AAR website, [www.aarweb.org/department/finding.asp](http://www.aarweb.org/department/finding.asp)). Every department chair who completed the census has received a special respondent's report showing how that program compares to similar ones, as measured by Carnegie classification, institutional affiliation, and region. The members of the Academic Relations Task Force, who oversaw the Census, are especially pleased that we can provide these highlights of the (still) emerging profile of the field for readers of *Religious Studies News*, *AAR Edition*.

Turning field-wide statistical data into information for strategic institutional decision-making has been a hallmark of the AAR's efforts to support departments through the Academic Relations Program. It was a guiding principle in the construction of the census questionnaire and project design. This report marks the first effort to provide such field-wide data from this survey. Thanks to it, we are better prepared to make the case that every student deserves an education that includes the study of religion.

#### Highlights from the 2000 Census of Religion and Theology Programs, Undergraduate

##### Institutional location

Of the responding programs, close to 25% were at public institutions and 20% were classified as "private non-sectarian." Catholic institutions accounted for 17%. The single largest institutional type was "Protestant," representing over one third of the responding units (324 total).

Institution Type	Frequency	%
1. Public	222	24.7
2. Private non-sectarian	183	20.4
3. Catholic	153	17.1
4. Jewish	3	0.3
5. Protestant	324	36.1
6. Other religious affiliation	12	1.3

Half of the responding chairs described their programs as "free-standing" departments. Another third chose "combined department" as the best description of their program. The remaining programs are "borrowing" faculty from other departments or are themselves part of a humanities or social science division. Nearly 90% offer a major or minor.

The general introduction to religion course meets institutional distribution requirements at nearly three out of four institutions where it is offered (74%). The introduction to world religion course does so at 67% of institutions that offer such a course. Introduction to the Bible courses fulfill such requirements at 72% of all institutions.

Programs and departments, the *Census* indicates, benefit strongly from institutional policies requiring students to take religion courses. Fifty-five percent of all institutions have such policies for the bachelor's degree.

This version of the Census targeted undergraduate departments. Of these responding departments, 25% reported that their institutions also offer a master's degree; and 8%, a doctorate.

##### Undergraduate curricula

We were especially interested in constructing some picture of the undergraduate offerings of departments. The Census divided undergraduate course offerings into three areas: Introductory, Traditions, and Topics.

Fifty-six percent offer what the Census described as a "general introduction to religion." A world religions introductory course is offered by 68% of respondents, and 69% offer an introduction to the Bible. Another quarter of responding programs (27%) offer an introductory course in sacred texts.

The Census could not capture every kind of introductory course. It did establish that fewer than four out of every ten departments offer separate introductions to Eastern (39%) and Western traditions (36%).

The Traditions section of the questionnaire reveals that Judaism is a subject of study at

40% of the departments responding. Islam and Buddhism are offered at nearly a third of departments, and Confucianism at a fifth. Hinduism is offered at 27% of responding departments, and indigenous traditions at 19%. While curricular offerings are decidedly focused on the Christian traditions at most responding departments, almost half of all departments (46%) offer comparative courses as well.

Programs offering courses in the following "traditions" — by percentage of those responding.	
Bible	
Old Testament	78%
New Testament	84%
Christianity	
Historical Christianity	71%
Christian Theology	65%
Christian Ethics	54%

Topics courses include a broad range of subjects, from American religion and new religious movements to women's studies and the arts. A third of institutions provided a response not included among the preprinted choices. These verbatim responses did not reveal an obvious pattern. In fact, many might have been reasonably included under one or more of the topics provided. For example, the course offering, *Religion and Film* was included under "Other" by one respondent, but similar courses at other institutions were likely to be included under the category, "Art and Literature." Nevertheless, the high overall response rate and the high completion rate for this large battery of questions — an entire page in the instrument — provides the best data available on undergraduate course offerings in religion.

Programs offering courses in the following "topics," - by percentage of those responding.	
American religion	42%
Arts and Literature	31%
Ethics	47%
Gender and Sexuality	29%
New religious movements	18%
Philosophy of religion	47%
Racial and Ethnic studies	21%
Ritual and performance studies	16%
Social Scientific approaches and topics	23%
Women's Studies	33%

See HIGHLIGHTS, p.ii

### Census of Religion and Theology Programs

Adapted from *Quality Profile for the AAR Census of Religion and Theology Programs*, National Opinion Research Center

#### Goals

The *AAR Census of Religion and Theology Programs*, supported by funds from the Lilly Endowment, set out to gain a better understanding of the current state of the field within the United States and Canada. To achieve this, the AAR contracted with the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago (NORC) to provide comprehensive and up-to-date baseline data on undergraduate education in the study of religion.

#### Defining the universe

In order to create as wide a pool of respondents for the census as possible, NORC created a database of all colleges, universities, and theological schools accredited in the US or recognized by the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC). It then established — using commercially available data along with the US Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System [IPEDS], the College Board College Handbook and a number of Internet databases — a list of all academic units at those institutions where the study of religion or theology is a central focus.

Institutions in the US that met the following criteria were included in the pool of institutions or census "universe." (1) They are recognized by the US Secretary of Education; (2) they are public or private not-for-profit institutions; (3) they are not central offices of public multi-university systems. These AAR-defined selection criteria produced a universe of 3,274 US institutions. Another 395 Canadian postsecondary institutions were identified as well.

The next step was to identify departments and programs (not every course) in which the study of religion is a "central focus." Evidence of having a central focus included any of these three criteria: (1) offers courses toward a major in religion; (2) offers courses for a minor in religion; (3) offers courses in

See NORC, p.ii

## HIGHLIGHTS, from p.i

Slightly more than one in ten responding programs reported a comprehensive examination requirement for majors. Majors are twice as likely to be required to submit a thesis paper. An additional 14% of responding programs permit a thesis paper as an option. The most common integrative experience is the senior seminar, with nearly half of all departments requiring it.

## Faculty

The questionnaire asked departments to report the number of full-time faculty during the 1999-2000 academic year by rank and gender. The largest departments were found at Catholic institutions, with 8.3 full-time equivalents. Public institutions had the next highest average number of faculty, at 6.6. Private (non-sectarian) and Protestant institutions had nearly identical averages, 5.6 and 5.8 respectively.

	Public	Private, non-sectarian	Catholic	Protestant
Average Full-time positions	6.6	5.6	8.3	5.8
Tenured positions	4.2	3.1	5.1	2.8
Tenure track positions	1.3	1.2	1.8	1.3
Long-term contract positions	0.3	0.5	0.6	1.2
Terminal contract positions	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.3
Joint appointments	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.2
Part-time positions	3.3	2.5	6.7	3.5

	Public	Private, non-sectarian	Catholic	Protestant
<b>Faculty Rank (% at each rank)</b>				
Professor	40.4	39.2	29.7	42.6
Associate professor	26.8	22.0	25.8	24.0
Assistant professor	17.9	23.4	23.0	23.1
Instructor/Other	14.8	15.3	21.5	10.4

## Evaluation

Nearly every program — 97% of respondents — uses student course evaluations to assess teaching performance. Nearly

three-quarters (72%) use evaluations by the program head. Self-evaluations are employed in nearly 60% of responding programs. Peer evaluations, reported in half of the cases, are the next most frequently used means of assessing teaching performance.

Less than \$50 000	24.0
\$50 000 - \$99 999	13.2
\$100 000 - \$249 999	20.8
\$250 000 - \$499 999	16.4
\$500 000 - \$999 999	1.6
\$1 million-\$2 million	3.7
\$2 million or more	1.7

## A look at the field, by institutional affiliation

	Public	Private, non-sectarian	Catholic	Protestant
<b>Student Profile</b>				
Ratio of religion majors to total enrollment	1 : 40	1 : 26	1 : 46	1 : 18
Number of declared majors (average)	30.4	22.1	23.0	51.3
Number of bachelor's degrees (average)	11.4	9.4	8.0	16.0
Women receiving bachelor's degrees (%)	56.6	49.8	53.7	39.9
<b>Curricular Profile</b>				
Average number of courses offered	35.1	27.4	43.4	38.6
Introductory courses as a percentage of all courses offered	*28.7	45.3	35.4	34.2
Percentage of reporting programs offering courses in				
(Traditions courses)				
Christianity	86.0	89.1	97.9	97.7
Buddhism	57.0	51.5	27.9	15.7
Confucianism/Taoism	37.1	26.7	19.7	8.8
Hinduism/Jainism/Sikhism	50.0	38.2	25.9	12.2
Indigenous Religions	35.5	16.4	21.1	9.5
Islam	51.1	49.7	29.3	14.9
Judaism	64.5	58.2	44.2	20.2
(Topics courses)				
Arts, Literature & Religion /Ritual & Performance	41.9	41.2	46.3	29.0
Ethics/Philosophy of Religion	72.6	67.9	57.1	66.0
Social Scientific Study of Religion./ New Religious movements	46.2	34.6	32.0	24.4
Women's Studies**	60.2	52.7	52.4	29.0
Racial and Ethnic Studies in Religion	25.3	20.6	26.5	16.4
American Religion	47.9	52.1	43.5	38.6
<b>Faculty Profile</b>				
Average Full-time positions	6.6	5.6	8.3	5.8
Tenured positions	4.2	3.1	5.1	2.8
Tenure track positions	1.3	1.2	1.8	1.3
Long-term contract positions	0.3	0.5	0.6	1.2
Terminal contract positions	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.3
Joint appointments	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.2
Part-time positions	3.3	2.5	6.7	3.5
Faculty Rank percentages				
Professor	40.4	39.2	29.7	42.6
Associate professor	26.8	22.0	25.8	24.0
Assistant professor	17.9	23.4	23.0	23.1
Instructor/Other	14.8	15.3	21.5	10.4

<sup>1</sup> Institution type variable derived from question A2. Carnegie classification (1994) was used to identify "Associate" institutions.

<sup>2</sup> Data regarding majors and baccalaureate degrees not reported for institutions that do not grant baccalaureate degrees.

\* Includes all sections of courses.

\*\* Includes Gender and Sexuality.

## A look at the field, by Carnegie Classification

	Research	Doctoral	Masters	Bachelors	Associates
<b>Student Profile</b>					
Ratio of religion majors to total enrollment	1 : 42	1 : 57	1 : 38	1 : 19	N/A
Number of declared majors (average)	35.6	28.0	27.8	35.2	N/A
Number of bachelors degrees (average)	12.7	7.7	9.7	11.4	N/A
Women receiving bachelors degrees (%)	55.7	46.9	48.6	45.6	N/A
<b>Curricular Profile</b>					
Average number of courses offered	43.9	49.7	39.3	30.6	22.5
Introductory courses as a percentage of all courses offered*	22.6	32.2	33.9	38.2	39.0
Percentage of reporting programs offering courses in					
(Traditions courses)					
Christianity	84.8	89.8	92.5	95.9	78.2
Buddhism	62.0	59.2	30.4	27.6	9.1
Confucianism/Taoism	39.1	26.5	20.1	16.6	9.1
Hinduism/Jainism/Sikhism	51.1	49.0	27.6	21.1	9.1
Indigenous Religions	32.6	36.7	20.1	14.0	9.1
Islam	66.3	49.0	29.4	25.8	12.7
Judaism	85.9	63.3	44.4	30.0	14.6
(Topics courses)					
Arts, Literature & Religion/ Ritual & Performance	54.4	51.0	36.9	32.9	9.1
Ethics/Philosophy of Religion	73.9	63.3	65.4	65.3	54.6
Social Scientific/ New Religious Movements	50.0	42.9	29.4	27.9	12.7
Women's Studies/Gender & Sexuality	59.8	57.1	49.5	38.0	12.7
Racial and Ethnic Studies in Religion	32.6	26.5	22.9	17.5	9.1
American Religion	63.0	57.1	48.6	42.4	27.3
<b>Faculty Profile</b>					
Average Full-time positions	8.9	9.7	6.2	5.1	3.1
Tenured positions	5.7	6.3	3.6	2.6	1.4
Tenure track positions	1.5	2.2	1.4	1.2	0.6
Long-term contract positions	0.5	0.4	0.7	0.7	0.7
Terminal contract positions	0.6	0.5	0.3	0.3	0.2
Joint appointments	0.6	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3
Part-time positions	2.6	5.8	4.5	2.8	3.9
Faculty Rank percentages					
Professor	41.1	37.3	37.6	38.2	43.8
Associate professor	28.9	29.6	23.9	24.6	22.2
Assistant professor	17.9	20.6	22.6	25.6	14.4
Instructor/Other	12.0	12.5	15.8	11.6	19.6

Data regarding majors and baccalaureate degrees not reported for institutions that do not grant baccalaureate degrees.

\*Includes all sections of courses.

NORC, from p.i

religious studies that are required for graduation. In order to be as inclusive as possible, departments and programs in the following areas (in addition to religion and theology) were included in the list of eligible academic units: Sacred Music, Religious Education, Bible Studies, Biblical Languages, Hebrew, Hebrew Studies, Jewish Studies, Islamic Studies, Pastoral Ministry & Counseling.

NORC submitted the full list of eligible academic units to the 10 regional AAR secretaries in June 2000. Lists were refined following this review. Altogether, these procedures identified a pre-data collection universe of 1,836 departments and programs.

Later, NORC selected 1,480 undergraduate academic units from this list. All were at institutions recognized by a US regional accreditor or by the Canadian equivalent. Data collection focused on these units. Where a number of institutions had multiple eligible units, separate questionnaires were sent to program heads at the same institution in order to be as comprehensive as possible. These were later screened to determine if such programs were independent academic units. Those that proved to be tracks within a larger religion or theology program were later excluded.

The census received responses from nearly three out of four academic units contacted. This is an exceptionally strong showing for a first time mail-based survey. NORC estimates an effective response rate of 78.1% of the likely eligible departments and programs identified in the universe.<sup>2</sup>

## Response Rates by Institution Type and Carnegie Class

To determine how representative the group of respondents was of the universe as a whole, we compared response rates across two institution-specific strata drawn from IPEDS data: institution type and institution Carnegie classification. Because IPEDS supplies data only for US institutions, the group of Canadian academic units was treated as a separate stratum. The "institution type" variable classified institutions on the public/private and religious affiliation dimensions. Carnegie classification data, also available on the IPEDS files, coded academic units according to their institutions' 1994 Carnegie classifications.<sup>3</sup>

The overall survey response rate mirrors response rates for different categories of institutions (see table). In the Carnegie classification dimension, unit response rates varied from 71.2% to 83.3 % for strata incorporating about 89% of the eligible universe. The lowest response rates were among the smallest and least typical strata. These two types of institutions — 2-year and community colleges and religious institutions that specialize in training clergy — do not organize their programs like the typical baccalaureate-granting institutions.

Nevertheless, the relative uniformity of response rates across institution strata suggests that responses to the AAR Census do not appear systematically to bias recorded data by failing to represent the universe of religion departments and programs as a whole.

**Response rates by Carnegie class  
(core universe, applies to US only)**

Stratum	Eligible Units	Response Rate
Canada	73	74.0
Research I	83	80.7
Research II	30	83.3
Doctoral I	29	79.9
Doctoral II	36	72.2
Masters I	228	75.4
Masters II	59	71.2
Baccalaureate I	159	71.7
Baccalaureate II	311	72.0
Associates	86	64.0
Religious	29	51.7
Other	10	45.5

<sup>1</sup> Eligible to participate in Title IV programs as determined by the Education Department's Office of Postsecondary Education, according to NCE's IPEDS director, Susan Broyles (telephone conversation with Lance Selfa, 4/3/2000). Values 1 or 2 for variable OPEIND (OPE eligibility indicator code) in the Institution Characteristics data set signify eligibility.

<sup>2</sup> Because the calculation of a survey response rate depends on a definition of the size of the universe and the precise eligibility definitions followed during the survey, several different response rates can be calculated. All of them are equally legitimate measurements of the degree of unit response to the survey, as long as assumptions about the universe and eligibility criteria are clearly stated. The American Association for Public Opinion Research lists six different methods of calculating survey response rates in its "best practices" guide, *Standard Definitions: Final Dispositions of Case Codes and Outcome Rates for Surveys* (Ann Arbor, Mich: American Association for Public Opinion Research, 2000), pp. 35-36.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on the IPEDS Institution Characteristics data files, see documentation on the National Center for Education Statistics' Web site at <http://www.nces.ed.gov/Ipedsic9798>. The Carnegie Foundation substantially revised its classifications of postsecondary institutions in December, 2000, when the AAR Census was in the field. This report uses the 1994 Carnegie classifications. Documentation can be found at: <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/Classification/classification.htm>.

## Data available from the Census

*The AAR Census of Religion and Theology Programs has comprehensively mapped the academic study of religion (religious studies, theology, and Bible) in the US and Canada. It achieved an adjusted response rate of nearly 80%.*

*Data is available in the following "streams":*

### Public:

Public data describes the entire universe of census respondents. The unit of analysis is the field itself, sorted into different strata by institutional affiliation, etc.

Public data is available to all members. It will be published in RSN and at <http://www.aarweb.org>.

### Respondent:

Respondent data describes program against field-wide data on selected variables (e.g. Carnegie classification,

department structure, institutional governance, size). See charts, Profiles by Carnegie classification, and institutional affiliation on p.ii

### Research:

Research data will be customized to provide finely grained analysis. It will include cross tabulations and other more advanced statistical procedures. Research data will be available on a fee-for-service basis. The service will include consultation on the research questions to be asked, selection of variables to analyze, and design of outputs. Departments enrolled in the Academic Relations Program will receive four free hours annually, and discounts on additional time.

## A multi-organizational effort

The following organizations are partners in the Census:

Association of Theological Schools  
Auburn Center for the Study of Theological Education  
Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion  
Canadian Society for the Study of Religion  
Council of Societies for the Study of Religion  
Fund for Theological Education  
Graduate Council for the Study of Religion  
Society of Biblical Literature

## ACADEMIC RELATIONS PROGRAM

Departments and programs enrolled in the Academic Relations Program receive resources for strengthening the study of religion. These include:

### Program Advisory Services

Annotated roster of qualified reviewers  
*Guide for Reviewing Programs in Religion and Theology*  
Promotional brochures

### Information & Data Resources

Census respondent reports  
Basic data research service with access to additional data research  
*Directory of Programs*  
Annual Chairs resource packet

### Leadership Education

Chairs Annual Meeting Workshop  
Chairs Summer Seminar

### EIS Center Services

Discounted fees  
Special Annual Meeting registration for non-religion faculty interviewers

For more information, visit [www.aarweb.org/department](http://www.aarweb.org/department) or call the Academic Relations Program. (see page 2 for contact information)

*Every student deserves an education that includes the study of religion*