

## RELIGION &amp; THEOLOGY PROGRAMS

## CENSUS

## The Study of Religion Counts

What We Know (and what we don't know) about the Shape of the Field

**J**ONATHAN Z. SMITH, University of Chicago, and Linell E. Cady, Arizona State University, gave thoughtful responses to findings from the undergraduate Census of Religion and Theology during a special topics forum (STF), "The Study of Religion Counts: What We Know (and What We Don't) About the Shape of the

Field" during the Annual Meeting in Denver. Smith and Cady responded to a preliminary research summary of the Census by Edward R. Gray, Director of Academic Relations. The research findings summary focuses on what has been learned from the census about programs, faculty, and enrollments at the undergraduate level, and reflects on what the data reveals about the

state of the field. The Census summary was published in the Fall 2001 issue of *Religious Studies News, AAR Edition*, and is also available online ([www.aarweb.org](http://www.aarweb.org)). The Census of Religion and Theology Programs was supported by a grant from the Lilly Endowment.

The research design, data collection strategies, and measures needed for filling lacunae in our knowledge was also discussed. The Academic Relations Task Force sponsored this Special Topics Forum. Panelists included Edward R. Gray, American Academy of Religion; Lance Selfa, National Opinion Research Center; and James B. Wiggins, Syracuse University, presiding.

## What does the Census data say about the study of religion?

### A private sector response

Jonathan Z. Smith, University of Chicago

**L**ET ME BEGIN by celebrating both our Academy and our profession for this Census. Within our field, it may yet take on the sort of mythic importance attached to the one invented by Luke in the service of one of the religious traditions we study. The AAR's initiative in undertaking this effort, with the crucial assistance of NORC, and the administrative labor necessary to bring it to fulfillment, along with the outstanding number of responses by our colleagues, has, already, gone a long way towards answering a pressing need in thinking about any educational enterprise: the replacement of anecdotes by data. Coupled with the recommendation for a special effort at re-surveying departmental structure, and with the proposed graduate program census, we will, at long last, come close to possessing a synoptic portrait of the total field in North America. The only piece that would be still lacking is a survey of the rapidly growing number of programs in religion in public schools, often designed in consultation with local college and university faculties.

Since the summary of the *Census* results was first published in the Fall issue of *Religious Studies News*, it has been a fascinating and instructive exercise to compare the results of this survey of the "total universe" of collegiate religion programs with one's impression of the state of the field gleaned from the more selective samples characteristic of past surveys; a set of influential reports on what might be termed with the new configuration of religious studies, ranging from Claude Welch's 1972, ACLS study, *Religious and Theological Studies in American Higher Education*, reprinted in JAAR. (Indeed, the title for today's session echoes the two questions that served as the heading of the concluding section to Hart's report, What do we not know that we need to know? What do we know from the present study that should lead to action and/or follow up studies?). Today, a mature confidence has properly replaced the tentative hopefulness and the uncertainty that characterized the earlier surveys and studies of the 60's and 70's, which were largely spurred by the explosion in religion programs in public institutions (one report, edited by Milton McLean, reviewed 25 state programs in 1960; 135 in a second version in 1967). This explosion had an enduring influence on private institutions (especially, non-sectarian colleges), often resulting in the conversion of Bible departments into religious studies programs, or in separating out the study of religion from philosophy. The present *Census* numbers would stun the authors of these earlier reports. Employing strict criteria, NORC identified a "core universe" of 1,480 programs in reli-

gion. While the raw numbers were not published, using unforgivably crude arithmetic, if I multiply out the average of the averages, this appears to convert to something in excess of 8,000 faculty; 40,000 majors; nearly 50,000 individual courses - some 25% of which are located in public institutions. We may not always know what we are doing, but we are doing exceedingly well at it!

It has been equally instructive to compare what the *Census*'s numerical data tells us with the quite different sort of information, gained by intensive interviews and observation at four institutions, in the just-published ethnography by Conrad Cherry, Betty DeBerg, and Amanda Portfield, *Religion on Campus*. This work, among other things, reminds us both of the extraordinary number of extracurricular courses in religious studies (from informal Bible-study groups to professional programs sponsored by national religious organizations), and of just how little the current AAR Census tells us about our students. Such lacks are, perhaps, appropriate to its institutional focus on faculty and on departmental structures, but they remain lacks nevertheless.

To take up the matter of students. We have had, as of yet, no report on the answer to question A7, as to whether a department or program offers a "minor in religion". The question of the growing trend of the 'double major' was not asked. The survey format will not allow us to discern, in either case, any patterns in what the 'companion' major might be. Similarly, without a disaggregation of the "total enrollment" figures asked for by question C12, it is impossible to gauge how many college students take only a single course in religion, how many are elective recidivists, how many are majors. Nor will a focus on "total enrollment" allow us to determine how many courses in other departments or programs are 'counted' as part of a student's religion major. That is to say, on the basis of the published Census data, we can begin to guess the degree to which religious studies programs support the liberal arts curriculum; we cannot clarify the degree to which the offerings of other departments support the religious studies curriculum. This support, at times, reflects intellectual interests; at times, it is made urgent by the relatively small size of the faculty in many religion programs.

Shifting attention to faculty matters, the Census summary provides too little information on the nearly 50% of the programs who describe themselves, in answer

See SMITH, p.23



## What does the Census data say about the study of religion?

### A public sector perspective

Linell Cady, Arizona State University

#### Editor's Note:

Linell Cady is Professor of Religious Studies at Arizona State University. "Religious Studies, Theology, and the University: Changing Maps, Shifting Terrain," a volume of essays co-edited with Delwin Brown, will be published by SUNY in the fall.

**W**ANT TO BEGIN by acknowledging the importance of this study for getting a handle on undergraduate programs in religion and theology in North America, and providing some information that can ground and correct our intuitions about the size and character of the field. We clearly needed to gain a more empirically informed understanding of what is going on in the study of religion, and we are fortunate that the AAR, with support from the Lilly Endowment, has been able to oversee the completion of this project. In his summary of the findings, Edward Gray notes that "our knowledge of the field has grown exponentially" from this study.<sup>1</sup> I suppose that is necessarily true, when starting from virtually nothing. That statistical metaphor did make me laugh, reminding me that what is "not said" with statistics is often as important as what is "said." I have been asked to reflect upon the findings of the Census from the perspective of public higher education. My remarks are based upon Edward Gray's highlights of the findings, since the entire data set has not yet been released.

Although the Census does provide a snapshot of the field as currently configured, it is clear that the picture will become much more revealing as it is situated in a comparative framework. The Census collected important information in a number of areas, including: the size of the faculty, broken down by type of institution and full-time and part-time positions; the number of religious studies majors and degrees awarded in the field; and the total enrollment in undergraduate religion courses. This information will grow in importance as we are able to identify trends in the field. For example, knowing the current number of majors in religious studies nationally is much less significant than knowing whether the number is growing, static, or on the decline. The same holds true for the total enrollment in undergraduate courses in religion. Information on national trends regarding majors and total undergraduate enrollment in the field can be quite useful for individual departments seeking to interpret their own enrollment patterns. The Census questionnaire did ask units to report information in a number of these areas not only for the 1999-2000 academic year, but for 1996-97 year as well. Since this revealing information regarding historical trends is not included in the highlights of the findings, I wonder whether

the omission is due to a sizable percentage of chairs not providing historical data that is not always very easy to retrieve. If this is the case, the meaning and value of the current data lies primarily in the future, when we can use it as a base to track ourselves through time.

In addition to capturing the periodic fluctuations in our own total undergraduate enrollment in religion courses, it would also be useful to secure total institutional undergraduate enrollment from each institution for comparative purposes. This would allow us to determine whether the field of religion is growing, static, or declining in relation to growth rates within higher education as a whole.

The Census portrait will also gain in interpretive value through comparison to data from related disciplines within the liberal arts. The number of majors or faculty — by institutional type or in the aggregate — will be much more significant when contrasted with similar data from, say, the discipline of history or philosophy. We could not even begin to understand ourselves in relationship to our academic neighbors until we began to gather this type of institutional information. Again, the Census is a critical first step in an ongoing process that promises to yield significant self-understanding as we locate ourselves in relation to the past and to neighboring disciplines in the liberal arts.

But enough about future promise. I want to consider what the data indicates about the current shape of the field, addressing first the issue of the institutionalization of the academic study of religion within higher education. Through a series of screening steps, the study identified 1,480 academic programs in North America in which the study of religion is a central focus. Data collection concentrated on this group. Focusing attention on this group is necessary if we are to grasp the shape of the field. It is also important, however, to situate the field in relationship to the broader universe of higher education. According to the US Secretary of Education, there are 6,836 institutions of higher education in this country. Narrowing this down to accredited, or in Canada "recognized" institutions that are public or private not-for-profit, the study identified 3,274 US and 395 Canadian institutions in the broader universe of higher education.<sup>2</sup>

See CADY, p.21



RESOURCES II, from p.12

rendered by Denys Johnson-Davies, this is a complex psychological novel from a Sudanese writer that touches on themes of colonialism, gender, and power. Set in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, it tells the story of a village boy who makes good, using his native intelligence to rise through the ranks and travel to London, and eventually return. It is at once disturbing and beautiful, working simultaneously on several levels.

Not nearly so complex is the novella by Ghassan Kanafani, *Men in the Sun*. Kirkpatrick's translation does not do justice to the Arabic, but the narrative of this powerful tale comes through clearly. Written before there was a PLO or a PA, *Men in the Sun* is an important reminder that most Palestinians do not live in Palestine or in Israel, and that Muslims and Arabs do not always treat one another as brothers. The novella is printed together with a selection of Kanafani's short stories, making a nice complement to the main text.

The two films I mention here both center on Egypt, which is reasonable, given the importance of this African nation to the Islamic world and the fact that Egypt is the world's third-largest producer of feature-length films. *On Boys, Girls and the Veil* (in Arabic with English subtitles) is a quasi-documentary that follows a young Egyptian

man through his daily routines of family, work and recreation. He and the director interview dozens of Egyptians, querying them about matters of dating, family and the importance of modest dress. The honesty of the candid responses is astonishing, and the result is an unusually clear picture of the many meanings of the headscarf within Egyptian society today.

Finally, *Umm Kulthum: a voice like Egypt* chronicles the life of the greatest singer of the Arab world in the twentieth century. Narrated by Omar Sharif, the documentary includes interviews with musicians and music critics, as well as wonderful footage of her concerts. Though the singer is rightfully the center of the film, important themes of gender roles, politics in the Nasr era, and the urban-rural divide are also addressed. In the Northeast, both films may be borrowed from New York University's Kevorkian center ([http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/program/neareast/7\\_video\\_catalogue.html](http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/program/neareast/7_video_catalogue.html)), and *Umm Kulthum* is available for purchase from Amazon.com.

As with most novels and films, religion is not the central issue in these sources. I argue that this is to the good. The more our students realize that Muslims can be singers, politicians and socialists, the better they can appreciate the variety of voices in the Muslim world.

CADY, from p.7

This means, then, that the academic study of religion is a central focus at approximately 40% of the institutions, making up the broader universe of higher education. In other words, 60% of the relevant institutions of higher education do not offer programs in which the academic study of religion is a central focus. This is a very high percentage.

It would be useful to know more about this group, particularly how they break down by institutional type and size. This is especially important if we are interested in getting a handle on the institutionalization of the study of religion in public higher education. One might well suspect that a very high percentage of religiously affiliated institutions have programs offering a central focus on the study of religion, leaving a higher percentage of the public and private non-sectarian universities without a religious studies presence. This is significant, particularly with respect to the scope or potential impact of the field vis-à-vis the entire cohort of students enrolled in higher education. According to the Department of Education's statistics for Fall 1998 — the most recent data published — 58% of all degree-granting institutions of higher education in the US are private, and 42% are public.<sup>3</sup> Although constituting only 42% of the total number of institutions, public colleges and universities enroll approximately 77% of all students, with the remaining 23% attending private institutions. Consider, further, that in the Fall 1998, 40% of US institutions enrolled fewer than 1,000 students, and they accounted for only 4% of the total college/university enrollment; 10% of the institutions enrolled 10,000 or more students, and they accounted for 49% of the total enrollment.


What does this all mean? In considering the institutional embodiment of religious studies in contemporary higher education, it is essential to keep in mind the large number of institutions in which we are not a real presence. Moreover, when institutional size is factored in, our very limited disciplinary presence for the aggregate North American student body within higher education becomes clear. Although this information is revealing about the institutional strength and scope of our field, I have to admit I am not sure how I feel

about it. From one angle, we have the proverbial glass not even half full; on the other hand, if we compare ourselves to where we were several decades ago, we can see considerable growth and transformation in the academic study of religion.

Among the more revealing aspects of the Census, in my judgment, is the large percentage of programs — 55% of them — indicating that the institution requires course work explicitly in religion for graduation. As Edward Gray puts it, "programs and departments ... benefit strongly from institutional policies requiring students to take religion courses."<sup>4</sup> This is clearly the case. The academic study of religion would not have a major programmatic presence at even 40% of accredited institutions of higher education unless such degree requirements were in place. It is a vital factor in sustaining the field as currently configured. It also points, however, to the hybridity of this field, to the diversity of motives that sustain it, and to the competing visions that it harbors, often uneasily. Indeed, talking about "the field" as I have done can be questioned insofar as it glosses over the deep divisions that mark who "we" are.

We have to be careful here: we cannot conclude anything about the agenda of particular faculty and courses by virtue of institutional affiliation, nor by whether or not the course is required for graduation. The information indicates something about the structural conditions within which individuals and units operate — conditions that admittedly exert a considerable influence. They do not necessarily determine what takes place within any given classroom, however. The information nevertheless does underscore the composite nature of our enterprise, as reflected in the very title of the Census: undergraduate programs in religion **and** theology.

The data on curricular offerings underscores our differences as well. What stands out most prominently is the extent to which the study of Christianity dominates the curriculum, with courses in the Bible taught at the highest percentage of responding programs. The centrality of Christianity in the curriculum is, of course, not all that surprising given the roots of the field in the seminary model, the dominance of Christianity among the North American student body as a whole, and the



## VIRTUAL TEACHING & LEARNING CENTER

Over the past decade, the AAR has mounted nine year-long workshops for college and university faculty on teaching religion. Approximately 170 scholars benefited from the sustained and organized reflective work and practice that the workshop enabled. In turn, these scholars have contributed to better teaching in the field—one course at a time. The AAR, with continuing assistance from the Lilly Endowment, has established a new project to make these contributions more widely available. In this way, excellent teaching, and the scholarship behind it, can be made "public."

The Committee on Teaching and Learning invites all members, and most especially participants in the Lilly/Luce/NEH sponsored Teaching Workshops to submit their projects to the new *AAR Virtual Teaching and Learning Center*.

When completed, this rich new online resource will include: the current AAR Syllabus Project (which has recently moved to <http://www.aarweb.org/syllabus/default.asp>); the entire series of our periodical, *Spotlight on Teaching*; information about evaluating teaching and learning in religion and assessing *departmental* teaching and learning, and links to other online teaching and learning resources.

To participate, please send an electronic or print version of course syllabi, bibliographies, revised assignments, classroom exercises, assessment techniques, or other materials. The *AAR Virtual Teaching and Learning Center* will make scholarly contributions to teaching available to the entire field and be a resource on which to build for many, many years.

**The CTL is seeking an editor for the site. Visit [www.aarweb.org](http://www.aarweb.org) for more information.**

Christian affiliation of over half of the responding institutions. As expressed in the highlights of the findings, "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."<sup>5</sup> Is this statistic to be interpreted as **almost** half, or **not even** half? A breakdown by institutional type sharpens the picture, revealing how much the field varies across the institutional spectrum. Protestant institutions are least likely to include courses in traditions other than Christianity, and public institutions are most likely. This is hardly surprising, given constitutional constraints of the separation of church and state. This is not to say that public institutions have untethered themselves completely from the seminary curricular model. Consider: only two-thirds of public institutions report offering a course in Judaism, with Buddhism offered by 57%, Islam and Hinduism by only half of the institutions, and indigenous religions by slightly over a third.

The data does suggest that the field of religious studies is distinguished from other disciplines within the liberal arts by the fact that it houses quite varied forms and agendas. Although this diversity is sometimes touted as a strength, it is also clear that it is a liability for securing a place within the arts and sciences at non-sectarian and public institutions. The problem is captured rather well in a short piece recently published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Grant Greene, a graduate student just completing his Ph.D. in religious studies pseudonymously authored "On the Market in Religious Studies." He writes:

Just imagine. You are a historian entering the job market. You specialize in ancient religion, Christianity, and Judaism, to be precise. You are trained in classical philology, fluent in all manner of Near Eastern languages, and conversant in historiography from Gibbon to Foucault.

Then upon finishing your dissertation, you find that, while jobs are not lacking, many jobs in your field are open only to members of certain religious groups. Employers, for instance, restrict consideration to those candidates who have a "personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior," or demand

a fourth letter of recommendation specifically detailing the candidate's devotion to the Baptist Church."<sup>6</sup>

Greene is more than a little troubled by the fact that "jobs are cordoned off by faith" and candidates are asked to demonstrate religious qualification. He finds it "offensive," and "contrary to my whole idea of academic freedom." To illustrate just how different the academic study of religion is from classics or history, he reports that, in a recent edition of *Openings*, "out of 28 faculty positions listed, 20 make explicit demands on the religiosity of the candidate."

The Census certainly provides a measure of empirical support to this portrait of our field, even though it remains at a very general level. The undergraduate study of religion reflects a broad range of missions that span the religious and secular divide. The mix continues to make it difficult for religious studies to establish an identity that locates it squarely and unambiguously within the context of the liberal arts and sciences. Establishing more firmly such an academic identity, in my judgment, remains our primary challenge as a field. This has become even more urgent given the demographic shifts in higher education that today result in almost four out of every five students attending a public institution. If we are concerned about the long term flourishing of the field, we need to remain attentive to that broader universe of higher education where we do not yet have a presence.

<sup>1</sup> Edward R. Gray, "What We Have Learned from the Census of Religion and Theology Programs," *Religious Studies News*, (Fall 2001), i.

<sup>2</sup> The above figures are taken from the "Quality Profile for the 2000 AAR Census of Religion and Theology Programs," prepared for the American Academy of Religion by the National Opinion Research Center, May, 2001. The figures for the United States are based upon the 1997-98 academic year.

<sup>3</sup> These figures are taken from the National Center of Education Statistics' Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), also used by NORC. See <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Gray, "What We Have Learned," i.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Grant Greene, "On the Market in Religious Studies," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, (Friday, September 28, 2001).

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to question A3, as being other than “free-standing departments”. While we have the gross categories — combined department, program that borrows faculty from a number of departments, humanities or social science department or division — as with students who minor (or double major) in religion, we have no sense of any patterns in the partners to these cooperative ventures. Similarly, by focusing largely on full time positions in the archetypal free-standing departments, we have no good feel for patterns of joint appointments, efforts at inter-departmental team teaching, and so forth, many of which carry neither appointment nor budgetary consequences for the religion department while enhancing its program. Certainly, the majority of “topics” courses listed, as well as many of the “traditions” courses, are scarcely the exclusive foci of religious studies on many campuses.

Although it was another kind of survey, I sorely miss, here, the sort of interests represented in Ray Hart’s “pilot study” by questions III.6 and IV.1 (which would need adjustment to the NORC protocol):

Does your ‘peer group’ (those with whom you discuss your scholarly work) include faculty in other humanistic or social scientific disciplines? If yes, which disciplines?

Do you ‘team-teach’ with colleagues in other departments or fields? (Hart: 815-17)

This is to ask whether, in its effort to demonstrate that “the study of religion counts” (an admirably clever double-entendre), the *Census* may present too isolated a portrait of the role of religious studies in collegiate education. I would have thought that one of the distinctive elements in many programs of religious studies in North America is their extraordinary comfort with their location within the wider human sciences, and the curricular and intellectual advantages both faculties and students derive from conversations and collaborations across fields that are enabled by their wider institutional settings.

This brings me to what I found to be the most significant and thought provoking finding of the *Census*. Let me quote Edward Gray’s summary, altering, slightly, his order:

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.

(Note the implications: despite our sometimes rhetoric, as a ‘business’, we depend not on public institutions, but on church related or formerly church related colleges and universities).

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(s) 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.

(Let me add that these introductory courses may also serve to fulfill major requirements, or as prerequisites for departmental offerings). To continue Gray’s summary:

Fifty-six percent (of all institutions responding) offer what the *Census* Described as a ‘general introduction to religion’. A world religions

Introductory course is offered by 68% of respondents. (39% offer separate Introduction to Eastern, 36% to Western traditions). Sixty nine percent offers an introductory course in sacred texts.

Leaving aside public and research institutions, where the percentages are lower (23-29%, even when sections are counted as courses), introductory courses typically constitute more than a third of the program’s total offerings, a stunning 45.3% in private, non-sectarian colleges. Unfortunately, we have been given no figures as to what percentage such courses represent of total departmental student enrollments.

I would draw several conclusions from these *Census* data. Despite the cornucopia of “traditions” and “topics” courses exhibited by the *Census* report, in the majority of our institutions, the primary introducing is our profession, our expertise. The enumerated “traditions” and “topics”, it would seem, take on a more than limited importance only if they find their place within the department’s introducing enterprise. (I shall reserve, for another time, the question of how we train, or fail to train, prospective teachers for the vocation of introducing).

These introductory courses are privileged economic as well as central intellectual components of departmental offerings. (On either ground, it is time we ceased derogating them as ‘service courses’). As the *Census* makes plain, substantial numbers of them fulfill college-wide requirements. As Gray suggests, these requirements are of two types (represented on the *Census* as questions A4a and B4). One is the older form, largely associated with institutions presently or formerly related to particular religious groups, a category which makes up some 55% of respondents to the *Census*. It specifically requires courses in Bible or religion. The second type is that in which courses in religion fulfill college-wide general education goals, most frequently expressed in the form of distribution requirements. These may be organized either by broad topics reflecting institutional interests (for example, x number of courses in the humanities; more recently, courses fulfilling diversity criteria), or by the acquisition of claimed subject-inde-

pendent, transferable skills such as writing (under rubrics ranging from ‘writing intensive courses’ to ‘freshman seminars’). Either way, this privileged category of requirement-fulfilling courses guarantees substantial enrollments, the coin of the realm with administrations in justifying appointments and in conferring status. For this reason, regardless of criteria, such courses remain the chief political concern of any department, and, often, the topic of long-lasting battles as to ‘turf’ - for example, with English departments over teaching the Bible.

While this would be a subject for another forum, I should note that the two types of general requirements have two very different policies. The older Bible/religion requirement is normally under departmental control. The listing of a religion offering as fulfilling a college-wide general education requirement is usually certified by an extra-departmental authority asking questions aimed less at subject matter than at educational goals. I would like to know more about how programs in religion answer such questions. I would ask, as well, whether the widespread use, in introductory courses, of published textbooks and anthologies requires adjustment when the agenda of such works fail to reflect institutionally specific general education goals.

As already noted, it would have been of some considerable interest to learn what proportion of the total enrollment was represented by these introductory courses (as well as, for that matter, other types of courses which chairs struggle mightily to have listed as meeting college-wide requirements). As is the case with most programs in the humanities - indeed, most programs, with the exception of economics, in the human sciences - it is my clear impression that religious studies exhibits a pattern of having relatively high numbers of course enrollments (not only in introductory courses) and relatively low numbers of majors. This has the curricular consequence that upper-level courses must often be taught as if they were introductions. Hence, in the case of the non-introductory courses, it would have been useful to learn what percentage of their enrollment consists of religion majors, what percentage of students are taking these courses as electives, what percentage of students take these courses because they fulfill another program’s requirements; what percentage of these courses carry prerequisites.

The *Census* summary notes, quite reasonably, that it “could not capture every kind of introductory course”. But, this leaves me unsatisfied. For example, I cannot discern whether the “general introduction to religion course” focuses more on religious traditions and topics,

or on issues in the study of religion. It is my sense, although the *Census* does not allow me to substantiate it, that sustained attention to the latter is often delayed, becoming the focus of a senior seminar. This raises, in turn, the question of the number of students who go on to graduate or professional post-baccalaureate studies in religion. Faculty perceptions - or cloning fantasies - of such student intentions often influence both the content (e.g. focus on methodological issues) and the format of the senior seminar or final exercise, as, for example, in the requirements of senior theses or comprehensive examinations in something like a third of the responding programs.

As a counter-weight to the traditional senior seminar, I would like to know the degree of programmatic experimentation in “capstone courses”, “student portfolios”, and the like - part of a national curricular trend, brought to our attention in 1990 by an AAR Task Force in its *Report to the Profession: Liberal Learning and the Religion Major*. *Census* questions C6c and d asked for information (lumping senior seminars and capstone courses together), however these figures have not yet been reported.

But enough...I have come, this afternoon, to praise this *Census* without equivocation. I repeat what I said at the outset of my remarks, the *Census* has “gone a long way towards answering a pressing need in thinking about any educational enterprise: the replacement of anecdotes by data”. The questions I have raised are an expression of impatient greed. I have learned so much that I want to learn more. I found the *Census*’s data provocative at every turn, data we have never had before in so total and so reliable a form. Thanks to the *Census*, we have begun to come to know ourselves. I would join in the hope that this year’s summary report of the *Census*’s findings will serve as an opening moment in a sustained, informed discourse devoted to educational matters, both within our Academy and on our campuses. I know full well that a good bit of my hunger is centered on knowing things a census instrument is not calibrated to elicit. But with the *Census*’s “total universe” in view, it should be possible to determine a small sample of statistically representative programs in each Carnegie category, which could be feasibly and economically re-surveyed or interviewed on a set of more qualitative educational concerns. For now, for those of us who hold out for the 2001 marker, this *Census* stands, appropriately, as our Academy’s millennial celebration. We are enormously indebted to everyone who participated in this corporate enterprise.

ELSHTAIN, from p.10

needs wisdom and guidance and grace, he said. A Greek orthodox Archbishop was invited to lead us in prayer. We all joined hands in a prayer circle, including the president. It was a powerful and moving moment. As the prayer ended and we began to rise, one among us began, haltingly, to sing “God Bless America,” a distinctly unchauvinistic song that Americans have turned over the past few weeks. We all began to join in, including the President. He then mingled, shook hands, and thanked us as we left.

All of us were aware we had participated in an extraordinary event. People shared addresses and business cards. We departed the White House to face a bank of cameras — always set up on the lawn. It began to rain softly. I stood next to my Sikh colleague and found myself gently patting him on the shoulder. I said, “I hope you don’t mind my doing that.” He said, “No, of course not. Please. I find it reassuring, very reassuring.”

As I got into a taxi for the long ride to Baltimore-Washington International Airport, I realized that I had no desire to

“spin” the event; to analyze it to bits; to engage in some sort of tight exegesis. Sometimes events just stand. They are what they are. If the President had simply wanted a public relations event, he would have done a quick photo-op (preferably the prayer circle scene, no doubt); cameras would have been whirring; we would have had a few well-timed and choreographed minutes. None of that happened. It was clear that the President wanted counsel; that he sought prayer; that he also hoped to reassure us that he understood the issues involved.

It was an afternoon I will not soon forget. I am grateful that I was able to join a group of my fellow citizens and members of our diverse religious communities, for an extraordinary discussion with the President of the United States.

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