L ET ME BEGIN by celebrating both our Academy and our profession for this: that we are in our field, it may yet take on the sort of myopic 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 it, is not without the outstanding number of responses by our colleagues, has, already, gone a long way toward meeting a long-simmering need in thinking about any educational enterprise: the replacement of anecdotes by data. Coupled with the recommendation for a special effort at surveying the undergraduate scene, and with the proposed graduate program census, we will, at long last, come close to possessing a reasonably accurate 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 Flann’s report, “What do we not know, and what do 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 60s and 70s, which were largely spurred by the explosion in religion programs in public institutions (one report, edited by Milton McLean, reviewed 25 state programs in 1968 and another 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, and 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 religion. 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 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 DelBerg, and Amanda Portfield, Religion on Campus. This work, along with other things, reminds us both of the extraordinary range 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 in universities, focusing on 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; I suspect that it is necessary, when transferring from the University to the academy, is not just an artifact of the increasing amount of research efforts in the study of religion, education. My remarks are based upon 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 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 religious courses. This information will grow in importance as we are able to identify trends in the field. For example, knowing the current number of religious studies 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 fluctua- tions in our own total undergraduate enrollment in religious courses, it would also be useful to secure total institutional undergraduate enrollment from each institution for comparative purposes. This would allow us to deter- mine 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 interpre- tive 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 philo- sophy. We could not even begin to understand ourselves in relationship to our academic neighbors until we began to gather this type of 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 religious courses. This information will grow in importance as we are able to identify trends in the field. For example, knowing the current number of religious studies 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
RESOURCES II, from p.12
rendered by Denys Johnson-Davies, this is a complex psychological novel from a Sufi's perspective on the experiences of those who have developed a close relationship with the Arabic, but the narrative of this powerful tale comes through clearly. Written by Denys Johnson-Davies, this is a powerful and moving story of a young man's struggle to keep in mind the large number of institutions enrolled 10,000 or more students, and they accounted for 49% of the total enrollment. The information provided is important for understanding the structural constraints of the separation of church and state. This is not to say that public institutions have unthertaken themselves completely from the seminar curricula. What We Have Learned from...We can certainly conclude 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 viewed as a strength, it is also clear that it is a liability for securing a place within the arts and sciences. 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, and you have a fourth letter of recommendation specifically detailing the candidate's devotion to the Baptist Church. Greene is more than a little troubled by the fact that "jobs are cordoned off by faith" and candidates are asked to demonstrate religious qualifications. 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 Opening, "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 validate the value of 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.


The above figures are taken from the "Quality Profile for the 2000 AAR Census of Religion and Theology," published for the Central Association of Religion by the National Opinion Survey Center, Inc, 2001. The figures for the United States are based upon the 1997-98 academic year.

These figures are taken from the National Center for Education Statistics Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), also used by NORC. See http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/briefs.html.

Gray, "What We Have Learned.", 1


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 the learning communities in their home institutions. While the focus is on college and university faculty, 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 for more information.
to question A3, as being other than “free- 
standing departments”. While we have the 
gross categories — combined department, 
program or thesis faculty or from a num-
ber of departments, humanities or social sci-
cence department or division — as with 
students, altering, slightly, his order:
ning we have no sense of any patterns in the 
partners to these cooperative ventures. 
Similarly, by focusing largely on full time 
professors, the core and teaching, and so forth, 
much of which carry neither appointment 
or budgetary consequences for the religion 
department while enhancing its program. 
Census data on major and minor courses 
listed, as well as many of the 
traditions and course, are scarce the exclusive foci 
of religious studies on many campuses. 

Although it was another kind of survey, I 
sorely miss, here, the sort of interests repre-
sented in Ray Hart’s “pilot study” by ques-
tions III.6 and IV.1 (which would need 
consideration for the NOREC protocol). 
Does your ‘peer group’ (those with whom you 
discuss your scholarly work) include faculty 
in other humanistic or social scientific disci-
plines? 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 
courses’ (an admirably double-enten-
dre), the Census may present too isolated a 
portrait of the role of religious studies in 
student’s enrollment consists of religion 
education. I have thought that one of the 
distinguishing elements in many programs 
of religious studies in North America 
requires adjustment when the agenda of 
the senior seminar or final exercise, 
which could not capture every 

We depend not on pub-
lic relations event, he would 

The introduction to world religion(s) 
course does so at 67% of institutions that 
of course, I do not want to 

SMITH, from p.7 

needless width and grace, he 
said. He then mingled, shook 

hands, and thanked us as we left. 

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 
group in so tight a esegies. 

We know the President wanted a public relations event, he would 
done a quick photo-op (preferably the 
 Nina Hass three scenes, if not, another), 
I was grateful that I was able to join a 

(For now, for the 
would have been whirring; we would have 

LIBERAL LEARNING AND THE RELIGION MAJOR 

The Census summary notes, quite rea-
sonably, that it “could not capture every 

A consequence of upper-level courses 
must often be taught as if they were 

The Census maximizes, so much as possible, that portion 

Census data are provocative, I believe 
that I would have been whirring; we would have 

...I have come, this after-
noon, to praise this Census without 
equivalent.” I report what I saw at 
the outset of my remarks, the 
Census has ‘gone a long way towards 
understanding some educational matters in 
both our Academy and on our campuses. 
In the introduction to world religion(s), 
the hunger is centered on knowing things 
so that it might be possible to 
determine a small sample of statistically 
representative programs in each 
Carnegie category, which could be and fea-
sibly and economically re-surveyed or 
interviewed on a set of more qualitative 
educational concerns. For now, for the 
those of us who hold out for the 2001 
marker, this Census stands, appropriate-
ly, as our Academy’s millennial celebra-
tion. We are indeed grateful to 
everyone who participated in this cor-
porate enterprise.

ELSHAGER, from p.10 

All of us were aware of an extraordinary 
event. People shared addresses and 

business cards. We departed the 
President was not among the cameras 
— always set up on the lawn. It began to 

rain softly. I stood next to my 
Patty Green three scenes, if not, another) 

there is a pressing need in thinking about 
any educational enterprise: the replace-
ing a pressing need in thinking about 
more than a third of the program 
courses, introductory courses typically con-
stitute more than a third of the program 
fundamentals. The enumerated 
requirements; what percentage of these 
courses carry prerequisites. 

Sixty-nine percent offers an 
introductory course in sacred texts. 

Let me quote Edward Gray 
who asked, as well, whether the wide-
spread use, in introductory courses, of 
between course and general education 
requirement is usually certified by an extra-
departmental authority asking 
questions more severe than subject matter 
only if they find their place within the 
department’s introducing enterprise. 
I have at least one more question to 
ask, if we train, or fail to train, prospective 
majors. This has the curricular 
merit is centered on knowing things 
so that it might be possible to 
determine a small sample of statistically 
representative programs in each 
Carnegie category, which could be and fea-
sibly and economically re-surveyed or 
interviewed on a set of more qualitative 
educational concerns. For now, for the 
those of us who hold out for the 2001 
marker, this Census stands, appropriate-
ly, as our Academy’s millennial celebra-
tion. We are indeed grateful to 
everyone who participated in this corpor-
ate enterprise.

It was an afternoon I will not soon forgot. 
I am grateful that I was able to join a 
group of my fellow citizens and members 
of the City of Washington, DC, for 
an extraordinary discussion with the 
President of the United States.