Ithaka S+R Religious Studies Project

Report of Interviews of Religion Faculty at Baylor University

By John Bales and John Robinson

This report summarizes Baylor University's part in the Ithaka S+R Religious Studies Project. Ithaka S+R created the Religious Studies Project in order to examine the impact in Religious Studies of shifting research emphases within the academy and of methodological shifts as faculty adopt a more interdisciplinary approach to their work. The Project also seeks to shed light on how libraries might help meet the changing research needs of faculty. Baylor, along with 17 other institutions of higher learning, participated in this study by interviewing Religion faculty and examining the results. A research team from Baylor interviewed fifteen religion faculty selected from the Department of Religion in the Baylor College of Arts and Sciences, from the Honors College, and from George W. Truett Theological Seminary. The team used a semi-structured approach that involved asking a set of twelve questions to Religion faculty and allowing them freedom to respond to the questions in ways they deemed important. The questions invited comments related to several broad themes. Themes of particular interest highlighted here include what theories and methods do the faculty use; what kinds of sources do they typically rely upon for their research; are they publishing in any non- traditional venues such as open access journals, blogs, or popular presses; how are they using the library and its services; and what are some of the challenges they are experiencing themselves personally or that they perceive to be challenges in their respective disciplines.

Theory and Method

Responses to the questions about theory and method revealed a complex of approaches and methods guiding the research of those interviewed. Many faculty were explicit in referring to the theories and methodological practices they use in their research projects. But others expressed that they work from a long tradition of reading and interpreting texts that leaves methodology vague and implicit, influential in their approaches, but in non-technical, informal ways. These faculty members rely on historical or literary analysis in some form, especially where the objective is the interpretation of texts for meaning and relevance in a contemporary setting. So, for example, as one faculty stated it, "I see myself as engaged with critical theory but doing that rooted in a theological tradition…. I read texts and interpret them." Another said that certain methods inform the research but are not employed formally or technically; "there's a certain amount of discourse analysis, although not in the formal sense that they have in mind. It's really theological analysis. So it's conceptual more than anything else and closely literary. … There's a fair amount of rhetorical criticism in an informal way involved in it." Or, as another faculty member said, "on one level it's an academic discipline so there's a kind of historical component to the work I do, but I really am trying to do that towards constructive theology which also serves the church." As for method, then, it's "the interpretation of texts."

As for those faculty whose methodological considerations are more technical and remain consciously in the foreground, some said they considered a wide range of methods available to them and used them according their needs. One interviewed said she takes an eclectic approach and does

not "exclude any kind of methodology if it helps interpret the text." Another said that the methods used include discourse analysis, historical analysis, and critical analysis, and the research is informed by "an intersection of these different discourses [critical theory, gender, race, identity theory, political theory, continental philosophy, analytic philosophy, linguistic philosophy]." Also, one said, "As I have grown in the field, I have included more methodology from social history and cultural history so that the history that I do is not the great person history or the domination of a military regime…. I pay a lot more attention as I am able to the common person's story within the narrative." And so, "I would say probably a feminist reading of history would be my basic framework as women have been neglected for hundreds of years in the writing and interpreting of history."

One faculty interviewed said that because of the nature of the research, he left his options for methodological approach open at the beginning of the research process. "I try to begin with as open ended a perspective as possible." The work is interdisciplinary and involves "a lot of different methods and ideologies." The different methodological choices depend on the kinds of sources used. The research involves a broad range of sources which include interviewing witnesses to instances of religious violence. The faculty's research relies upon eye witness accounts from victims and victimizers, "oppressors and oppressed." "I'm looking at a lot of different perspectives all at once. …This is a "Paulo Freirean approach to discourse analysis," …an examination of "how different class groups are responding to one another." Additionally, this faculty member employs the work of Derrida, Bourdieu, and Foucault to inform "how one should not assume that the terms themselves have…some kind of internal validity," that meaning is not inherent in the words of the witnesses themselves but in the social and political contexts in which the witnesses use them.

Another faculty member said the aim of his research is constructive theology and improved religious practices such as prayer. For background he employs various methods of social science. This entails analyzing literature related to the topic, including both quantitative and qualitative studies, and "actually getting out and doing interviews with ministers, doing interviews in congregations, and getting a sense of what the questions are." There are "several figures I've drawn upon that look at sociology of religion in particular but also sometimes psychological or other sociological theories." But since the research aim is constructive theology, and therefore interdisciplinary, "I would put those pieces in conversation with biblical and theological resources."

Another faculty member interviewed takes a phenomenological approach to the study of religions. "I believe we are all embedded in our phenomenological approach and that we can't really escape our embodied experience of religious tradition and religious phenomena." This faculty member, and others, use a comparative study of religion approach in order to help get beyond their own traditional bias. "I guess I believe that Western constructs of religion over focus on belief and really don't take into account enough practice in material experience of religion. So this is why I really love doing comparative religion because I feel like there's a way in which the definitions of religion really differ. So when I do a comparative analysis I can really [examine] how religion is understood and how it should function in society."

Several faculty interviewed said they relied on literary and cultural criticism and the work of the postmodern theorists in their approaches to research. One said, "I do a much more socially located reading of the psalms…. I have some historical interest but I think many people who read my stuff would say it is much more reader response driven than it is historical reconstruction." "I was trained as a form critic and so my default is, What's the structure of the passage? What's the literary genre of the passage? What's its social location in antiquity?" At Berkley "I started reading…Terry Eagleton literary theory, Austin on performative language but also folks like Norman Gottwald on social scientific analysis in the Old Testament. So when I open up a text one of the first things I'm going to do is just look at how the text is put together as literature. As I do that, I'm going to ask, What are the power relationships that the text either testifies to or wants to construct." "What I do is unpack the embedded power assumptions that are in the text and that for that community would have seemed so natural that they would say, Why would you even care about that?"

Along these same lines, another faculty related the importance of Postcolonial Studies in researching an early Christian author and his social context because the author was from a province in the Roman Empire and conceivably existed in a relationship to political power that we might now characterize as "Postcolonial" or "Anticolonial." Postcolonial criticism aids "how we understand their …political statements." Additionally, postmodern theory challenges the modern interpreter to address "how predetermined concepts shape our reading of the evidence" and helps us "get past our own constraints of how we see the evidence." And so the researcher takes social class into consideration and family relationships in a world that saw family, politics, economics, and religion as intertwined and not separable as we do in our context.

The interviews revealed that research in the field of religion has become very interdisciplinary, involving a broad range of theories and methods that cannot be accounted for in some short list. Many of those interviewed explained how their particular research needs were assisted by a complex of different approaches. Other faculty interviewed did not immediately name a method or theory in response to the interview questions but described processes and habits of research that only implied certain theoretical and methodological approaches. Thus theory and method seems intertwined in different ways for different faculty according to their training, research subjects, and objectives. One faculty jokingly responded to the question "What theoretical approaches does your research rely on?" by answering "probably none!" And then went on to say: "You don't begin with theory. You end with theory by looking backward to see how you have proceeded and how you therefore might proceed in the future."

What sources does your research rely on?

In general the faculty interviewed reported that the sources they use for research are mostly literary texts, both primary and secondary; typically books and journals, and other kinds of written documents such as letters and diaries, and manuscripts. As the research becomes more interdisciplinary, however, they reported using other kinds of sources, a firsthand examination of the artifacts of archaeological discovery, for example, or quantitative studies in the social sciences.

For Biblical Studies primary literary sources include the biblical text and other ancient contemporaneous texts through the second century. The faculty reported using translations some but preferred original languages. The "research depends on a good form of the Hebrew text...[and] a good form of the Greek version of that text." "It relies on primary texts, ...most of it Greek and Latin, some Hebrew texts,...sometimes in translation but usually ... the texts in their original languages." In addition, the research depends on other literary sources that help provide the literary and historical contexts of the biblical writings including "Jewish scriptures, early Christian commentaries," "...ancient historiography, ancient fiction, ancient rhetorical handbooks, and then the body of interpretive literature that surrounds that." Access to these early sources includes such online tools as BibleWorks, Logos, and Accordance for the biblical texts and TLG, Cursus, and Perseus Digital Library for contextual sources.

Primary sources for Church History include a wide range of archival material accessible in a variety of formats. There are minutes of meetings of churches and associations, diaries, and newspapers. Archival material may be available in print, microfilm, or digital format, and sometimes accessible only on location at the libraries and institutions that house them. Hinting at an opportunity for Baptist archivists and institutional leaders to promote the digitization of important historical materials, one faculty said, "when I write about a national issue I have to go to Atlanta and Nashville, and when I write about a Texas issue I have to go to the Texas collection or up to Southwestern Seminary or up to the historical collection in Dallas with the Texas Baptists."

One faculty member whose research focus is on the icon tradition of the Eastern Orthodox church said he sees the icons themselves as sources in some sense. "I'm not sure I would call this research ... but the acquisition of icons is very important because icons are meant to be venerated ... they are meant to be a means of prayer... an aid to and means of worship."

When the research becomes interdisciplinary, the faculty access other kinds of sources, sometimes directly and often through the secondary literature. In the field of Christian ethics, one researcher relies on such primary sources as UN reports and the secondary reporting of data summaries. In the field of archaeology, some faculty studied or expressed the desire to study the artifacts themselves. One faculty reported studying archaeological finds to produce "bone data sets in order to talk about diet and economy. I have to know what the archaeological remains indicate people are eating meat wise." More often, faculty access archaeological research through secondary literature and conferences. "I depend on books that are site reports of excavations. I depend on a lot on articles because, of course, that's higher profile for any of the work archaeologists do. I rely on conferences...and talking to other archaeologists but also seeing their research presented."

For contemporary religious and political studies, sources of research include firsthand accounts of events. "I try to depend on sources that are as close to that area of engagement as possible...I try to look at firsthand accounts. I try to parse from those firsthand accounts...what might be problematic, checking those firsthand accounts with other accounts, trying to place it in a larger context." The firsthand accounts have to be examined in light of a broader understanding of political and cultural influences. "So, for example, if an incidence of religious violence is happening ... in Northern Nigeria, I

would want to be looking also at political influences in that region. So I can't simply rely on a religious perspective." "[You have to think about whether] there's an economic, political or some other kind of social factor that would have meaning and bearing on my conclusion that other readers will bring to their analysis of my conclusions and research."

So, while the study of religion still relies heavily on texts, the desire to capture a broader based understanding of religious knowledge and practice has encouraged the study of non-literary sources made possible through other disciplines of study.

Publishing Venues.

The questions around this theme attempted to tease out interest in non-traditional kinds of publishing such as blogs, social media, open access journals, and popular magazines. The most common publishing venues for religion and seminary professors remains traditional print, articles in top tier journals, monographs by academic presses, and collections of essays. The faculty reported that these traditional venues are still the most sought after ways of scholarly communication for several reasons. Some pointed to the requirements of tenure; others the superior critical review process; and one said the audience sought could be found only through traditional publishing avenues.

The faculty said they mostly publish monographs and journal articles. "The ideal is always to publish in a tier one journal," one person said. Others said they currently publish only books because they are well established in their careers and sought by publishers for their known expertise. One faculty outlined the process for quality publication in three parts. "Everything that winds up in physical print begins in spoken word and lectures and talks given at various places where I get to try out my ideas, have them tested, have them challenged, have them expanded. Those then become essays which I seek to publish in a variety of journals." Publishing in a journal is the second part of the process, the third: "a book and that usually means reworked essays."

A number of those interviewed said essays published as chapters in themed collections have become widespread. Often publishers contact presenters at conferences, soliciting their work for a collection. But one person expressed concern that the indexing for essays in collections is not as complete and thorough as for journal articles. As a result readers are less likely to discover them. The faculty said it is better therefore to wait and publish in a valued journal.

Many of the faculty interviewed also reported that they avoided in practice non-traditional publishing in blogs, social media, open access journals, and semi-popular magazines. Most interviewed said they avoided blogging, for instance, because of time costs, the difficulty of its meshing with traditional forms of scholarly communication, and quality control. "[Blogging] takes too much time," "… a huge waste of time. I'm told by people who blog if you don't blog very regularly or frequently, you lose your readership." Another said, "I find that people who blog most, actually never publish anything else." More than one faculty member saw blogging as too self-promoting. Another said, should there be ideas worthy of incorporation into traditional publishing venues, there isn't an easy way to refer to

them, there is no citation information. Others were concerned about a lack of formal peer-review. "I worry about young scholars. I mean that is the millennial way of doing this, the blog, us[ing] social media. [This form of scholarly communication] lacks the kind of peer review that one would like to see."

And yet, many noted the potential good of blogs. They recognized the power of a faster way of communicating. "There are times when blogging and social media allow one to render judgments more quickly than one would have otherwise." So, for example, in the case of the gospel of Jesus' wife, "a lot of work was done to demonstrate that this was more than likely a forgery,... done by people on blogs who accessed images that were posted and then they wrote pieces and then they were read back and forth. It would have taken two years for the scholarly literature to have produced the evaluation that was being done almost immediately....Immediate judgments can be great." Similarly others saw some benefit to blogging in the desire to reach a broader audience. "I think it's really important...to engage serious readers, lay readers, so I've written for popular journals and for newspapers. I have written on a few occasions for blogs." Another said in the context of reaching broader audiences, albeit with the pursuit of tenure out of the way, that "if I could figure out where and how and when I would love to start a blog and maybe now my tenure stuff is done I will start to think in terms of say taking a little segment from something I'm writing and putting it into a blog. I can see that being valuable."

Many faculty interviewed claimed to regard open access publishing, another challenge to traditional publishing, more favorably in concept, and yet they typically avoided it in practice for a variety of reasons. Most consider the review process inferior. "I mean sadly they're ranked so low on what counts as...scholarly literature," one faculty said. Another said "I also don't know that it's as vetted as well and so the blind peer review process, if you don't go through that, then it's really not considered a top publication site." Another faculty argued against open access on the grounds that traditional ways of publishing are where experts go to read a scholar's work: "You can publish wherever you want but nobody's going to read it." Similarly, there's the sense that open access invites more opinion by the non-expert, more stuff to wade through: "I'm not opposed to them ...I have a specific focus...I don't really feel a pressing urge to hear people's opinions and participate in a larger discussion where people are not really focused." On the other hand, one person interviewed expressed an appreciation for the idea of open access and argued that the entrenchment of the top tier journals was an unfortunate hindrance to other good possibilities: "You know, sometimes top tier produces a bunch of garbage to be honest with you. And it's simply the aura, the reputation of the school where the person is or whatever. It gets published. So I believe in open access." Another case demonstrates how the established leaders of the academy maintain the entrenchment of traditional modes of publishing through their guidance of the next generation of scholars. When asked about open access publishing, one faculty interviewed simply said "I've been told not to."

A number of faculty expressed a need to reach a broader audience which blogging and open access journals might serve. And yet typically the faculty said they rely on certain semi-popular publications to reach beyond the academy, a publishing venue they considered more complementary to academic publishing. They mentioned the Christian Century, for example. There are also scholarly but non-technical publications that reach more than just members of the academy: "I seek a wider audience of both scholars and laity. I don't publish in what might be called technical journals. I publish

in theological journals and literary journals where the audience consists of other academics but not only so."

Most faculty interviewed seem to recognize the potential of non-traditional publishing venues, faster communications among scholars and reaching broader audiences, for example. But the need for a trusted level of peer review and for controlling for a variety of kinds of audiences seems to challenge this potential. The entrenchment of traditional publishing perhaps slows the development of non-traditional publishing to meet these demands.

Locating Sources for Research, Library Use and Its Services

The faculty interviewed generally expressed appreciation for the library and its services. Some wished for more resources in print or online depending on the particular challenges they encounter in their research. Most interviewed said they identify sources for their research through online searching, whether by using Google Scholar, Amazon, and Gobi, or by accessing the library's resources remotely.

The faculty reported a wide range of ways of discovery of sources for their research. They regularly use journals and books and their cited sources, "just the old fashioned way..., you read an article, you look at the footnotes." They also reported relying on book reviews found in databases available through the library online resources page, such as "ATLA and JSTOR and [the discovery tool] OneSearch." Some referred to web sources like Amazon as sources of discovery. Many said they use Google heavily. One faculty noted the value of Google's access to blogs. "There's a lot of blogging of … summaries of recent books. People like to blog books as they read them…."[They] do chapter-by-chapter summaries." Another faculty member said he uses lexicons to discover additional primary source authors based on word use. So, reportedly, faculty still discover sources in a familiar variety of ways but now more than ever they are able to pursue these ways online.

Many of those interviewed noted their increased ability for gathering their resources quickly and easily without coming to the library in person. They referred to the Library's interlibrary loan service and its online request system Osofast as the chief means for facilitating this increased ability. As one person put it, interlibrary loan "is really central to my life as a scholar here." In addition to borrowing resources from other institutions, interlibrary loan now also integrates faculty delivery into its service, so that through Osofast, a faculty member, or graduate assistant, can order sources not available digitally that, whether owned by Baylor or borrowed from another institution, will be delivered directly to the faculty offices. As a result, one can now say, "I don't go to the library anymore because I don't need to."

Challenges in the field of Religion

The faculty interviewed named a number of challenges to doing research in the field of Religion. Several used the word 'fragmented' to characterize the state of their field of study and to name a principle challenge to their research. While the word 'fragmented' expresses difficulty, the faculty used

the description in contexts that also at least alluded to the richness and openness of religious, theological, and biblical studies now available through new generations of scholars and a broad range of interdisciplinary influences.   Thus, in talking about fragmentation in the study of Religion, the faculty interviewed illuminated both important challenges and opportunities.

One significant problem some faculty pointed out is the breakdown of meaningful dialogue within their discipline. "It is so fragmented, both in terms of ideology and in terms of method, that we have an increasingly difficult time talking with one another," one said. The challenge is having a "sustained discourse with people who don't see the world the same way." Another lamented the loss of what might be referred to as everyone playing the same game with a single set of rules. "There's almost no agreed upon premises anymore." "[There] used to be a day and age where you just wrote your prolegomena and you're all using whatever…rationale to construct a systematic theology for the day. And someone else may disagree with you but they had to construct their own reasons for why your rationale didn't work and their rationale does work. And it's almost as if people have given up on that project today."

A number of distinct social groups employing specialized ways of reading texts and traditions have added to the richness of religious studies. And yet a number of faculty noted how the same basis for richness has contributed to fragmentation. Researchers tend to work in small subgroups, each with their own publications, employing "a bewildering number of methods." "[The field] is populated by, you know, the people who do ethnic based theology and ethics. …With women folks and Latin folks and what have you." "We have the whole nature of pluralism. So in modern theology there's feminist theology and among feminist theolog[ies] there's classical feminist and womanist theology. There is liberation theology but liberation theology can be African-American. It can be South American. It can be Korean. There's such a diversity of theologies today. So the very strength of access has led to complete fragmentation."

A corresponding fragmentation exists in the publishing world. One faculty member looking for help in understanding interdisciplinary research lamented how the "the secondary literature is siloed," and so was of little assistance in his attempting research in an unfamiliar field.   Similarly, the fragmentation makes it difficult to know how to write for a broader audience. How does one address such a diverse group. "You never want to write in a vacuum. I mean you always write…with a certain audience in mind and with certain conversation partners in mind….But the field is increasingly diverse in the sense that it's fragmented in such a way that it's not clear to me that the various kinds of subgroups read each other anymore or listen to one another."

Fragmentation also contributes to the undermining of one's ability or, as one faculty member said, the willingness to engage the research of others with honest critical assessment. "I think the greatest danger in religious studies…[is] too high a level of tolerance…" There's a culture that softens the criticism, embraces poorly done work because "it isn't politically correct to criticize someone else's work if you are not in their area." "And so there is a certain amount of scholarship being done in religious studies now that is more speculation and opinion but presents itself as hard core scholarship."

Furthermore, increased specialization has led scholars to the loss of a broad understanding of the field: there's a focus on the most recent things but young scholars in training "have no interest in the history of scholarship." One faculty member said, "I took a course in the history of the interpretation of Paul from the second century to recently. You don't really get those in seminary anymore. So then you get graduate students who come not having a familiarity with the history of the discipline…. [While] there have been major moves forward in the field, that doesn't relegate the research in the past as irrelevant but it does change the way one looks at it."

Interdisciplinary research offers new and creative ways of engaging a field's subject matter, even though it presents unique challenges and contributes also to the sense of fragmentation in the field. Some of the challenges revolve around the problem of working in a field for which one has not been trained. A number of the faculty interviewed expressed concerns along these lines. They encounter different kinds of sources, different methods, and different kinds of data that they feel ill equipped to make sense of. One faculty member interviewed said he had a struggle "finding the right psychology and sociology materials and even reading and understanding what they're saying. …I'm not trained necessarily at any kind of depth in reading quantitative statistics so I don't always know exactly what the articles are trying to say and I'm trying to glean as much as I can."

A constellation of difficulties stand as obstacles to be overcome when working in an unfamiliar field. There is the challenge of having sufficient general knowledge of the field for "identifying the sources" relevant for the research topic, the problem of knowing "what exactly is all needed…familiarizing oneself with the kind of complexities of [the topic]." One person said, "The challenges are mainly intellectual. How much of what I read do I understand?" The sheer quantity and density of primary texts in an unfamiliar discipline is an enormous hurdle. One faculty member had a book proposal accepted but with the request for the addition of a critical engagement with some significant French primary sources in philosophy. "The challenge is where do you go…because there's tons of text in French phenomenology…. And they're difficult texts so figuring out well how do I wade through all of this in an efficient way." Then there are also potential language barriers in the secondary literature. "I can struggle through Italian and I can read French and German. [But] there's actually one research problem I did not do because most of it [was] written in Russian."

The sheer quantity of publishing in all fields is a challenge that is multiplied in interdisciplinary work. There "is the complete inundation of data today where it is absolutely impossible to stay on top of any field…. The inundation of information means that it's very hard to sort out the quality of those things." "We are really getting past the point where you can have one scholar writing a monograph about something…. There's too much for one person to undertake, too much data, too much information."

In addition to the challenge of fragmentation in the field of religious studies and the challenge of interdisciplinary research, the faculty interviewed named other challenges as well. Securing funding for research stands out as a prominent example. The availability of grants and other kinds of funding leans in favor of the STEM disciplines, therefore the arts and the humanities suffer in a tight budgeted environment. Faculty expressed the ongoing need "to justify your own existence." "There [is] limited

resources for the kind of work we are interested in and not that many places to go for grants that aren't hard sciences….Practical theology could use more money to do these kinds of research projects that I'm describing." But also some faculty noted that a struggle for funding takes place within religious studies too. Decision makers skew the allocation of resources in favor of more traditional research. "We're dramatically underrepresented in these newer disciplines. The new disciplines should be seen as …needing,…some priority in the way resources are discussed and new funds and opportunities are perceived." Funding needs include not only the acquisition of sources but also access to sources that incur the expense of travel to archives, for example, or to interviews.

Several faculty expressed as another challenge a concern over the growing irrelevance of academic research, and they are seeking ways to make their work connect with a broader audience. One person interviewed said it will be necessary to make religious studies speak to a broader audience by "taking it out of the university setting and making it applicable to people's lives." "So the challenge for me is to make my work applicable… or to make my work relevant for others outside my very small discipline. They'll want to hear it. They want to read it." "So many scholars are unable to get out of that technical jargon laden world that they speak only to their own circle and just bore the public to death and the public ignores us quite rightly."

Finally, one faculty member looks ahead to the new opportunities for studying how people live their religious experience in daily life. In the current environment with all the new ways of communicating (social media) there's a new opportunity to study "lived religion." "I think the challenge will still be to look at lived religion because I think what people say they do and what they say they believe is very different than what they actually do in the way that they live and interpret their religious beliefs and practices in daily life."

Throughout the interviews, when addressing the challenges to research, especially interdisciplinary research, some faculty explained how they have worked around problems, and others expressed wishes for how they might find solutions. Many expressed a need for collaboration and teamwork with, or guidance from, those who are experts in the unfamiliar fields. One person said, "Part of the way we managed to do the research was consulting with experts in the particular subfield. So, asking a colleague in Reformation studies who should we be looking at one and two, where's the best way to get the most reliable texts for those? It was a project that required a team really." And as already mentioned above, another said , "We are really getting past the point where you can have one scholar writing a monograph about something…. There's too much for one person to undertake, too much data, too much information." And perhaps the general feeling might best be expressed as another put it, "Sometimes I would love to have someone who could guide me through those types of things and help me understand what I'm looking at and I don't always know when I'm looking at such an article what I have or where to find the kind of article or what language to type in to find the material I'm looking for, and I think that' probably because I'm doing interdisciplinary work." These ideas hint at possible ways the library might assist in addressing the challenges.

Conclusion

      This report summarizes some of the findings from interviews with 15 faculty from Baylor's Department of Religion, the Honors College, and Truett theological Seminary. Questions about the process of research in Religious Studies revealed challenges in a field no longer characterized by a common story and rationality but by fragmentation, a fragmentation brought on by the interpretive lenses of special interest groups, the influx of new methods from other disciplines, a flood of new publishing, and a desire to communicate beyond the narrow audiences of the academy. The faculty interviewed expressed appreciation for the creative new opportunities that these diverse influences make possible, while at the same time they lamented the difficulty of navigating the field in its current state.

      One of the biggest challenges many faculty noted is the difficulty of working on topics requiring an interdisciplinary approach that involve methods, languages, and other skills outside the scope of one's original training and experience. Two thoughts faculty expressed reveal possibilities for how the library can assist. One is the wish for a guide to show how to work in an unfamiliar field, and the other, that it is no longer possible for one person alone to publish a work based on so many sources and kinds of research. It is conceivable in this context that liaison librarians can supply not only experience and instruction in using the tools of research in unfamiliar fields but can also serve as a bridge between disciplines, helping to form teams of faculty that issue jointly authored research products.