CHAPTER 5

# *Current Trends in Religious Studies & Theology Collection Development*

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Collection development facilitates patron access to information, a core value of librarianship. It is a way in which the profession empowers patrons in critical thinking and knowledge creation. Without relevant materials that meet the needs and challenge the minds of library users, librarians are not optimizing patrons' ability "to become lifelong learners–informed, literate, educated, and culturally enriched" (American Library Association 1999).

This chapter encourages the theology or religious studies librarian to think deliberately about the needs of their patrons and about strategies to develop an enriching collection that meets these needs. Results from a recent study describe the current collection development trends in the discipline.

## *Literature Review*

Research relating to religious studies and theology collection development can be categorized into two areas: identifying patron information needs and describing methods for engaging in collection development activities.

## *Patron Information Needs*

In the recently published second edition of Gregory's (2019) *Collection Development and Management for 21st Century Library Collections,* the author encourages librarians to frame collection development through an assessment of user needs, stating, "Knowledge of the community that the library serves… is the keystone of effective collection development" (13). On a local level, Gregory suggests approaching a needs assessment periodically (as patrons and their needs change) and preparing for this assessment by asking questions: who and what will be studied?; where are data collected?; when should the data be collected?; and how are the data interpreted? (14–18).

On a disciplinary level, a recent study sponsored by Ithaka S+R explores the information needs and practices of religious studies and theology scholars (Cooper et al. 2017). This research, conducted across 18 institutions of higher education, concluded that "digital discovery and access have greatly improved these scholars' research experiences with relatively few challenges" (15), though scholars do face barriers to incorporating digital methodologies (such as digital humanities) into their research. Other researchers, such as Knievel and Kellsey (2005), who conducted a citation analysis across humanities fields, and Shirkey (2011), who conducted a syllabus analysis "to really understand what students go through" (159), can complement Cooper et al. (2017) by providing another perspective into information needs of religious studies scholars and students. Knievel and Kellsey's (2005) study found that 88.2% of citations in their sample of religious studies scholarship were of monographs. This was the highest of the eight humanities fields they investigated and reaffirms Hook's (1991, 216) statement that "religious and theological discourse continues to rely more heavily on book length monographs." While Cooper et al. did not focus on the format of information that scholars consumed, they did note that scholars reported analyzing "primary and secondary source material in both physical and digital forms" (2017, 20). Since this research found that digital availability of secondary sources supports religious studies scholarship, librarians may be motivated to consider purchasing more digital monographs in e-book format. Understanding evolving information needs and research practices can help religious studies and theology librarians to purchase materials that meet the needs of patrons in these disciplines.

Several works emphasize the importance of personally engaging with patrons in order to identify their needs (Alt 1991; Gregory 2019; Little 2013; Schmersal, Dyk, and McMahan 2018). Strategies include speaking with faculty and students (especially graduate students) (Alt 1991; Schmersal, Dyk, and McMahan 2018) and consulting members of the curriculum committee to gauge needs with the understanding that collection development decisions "cannot be made in a

vacuum" (Alt 1991, 209). Alt goes on to describe the importance of using both "collection-centered" and "client-centered" methods to determine patron needs. Where collection-centered collection development methods seek to compare the library to that of a peer institution, client-centered methods mean conducting surveys and interviews to determine the present strengths and weaknesses of the collection in meeting user needs (211). Alt's article and its implications for collection development activities can be updated and expanded upon, especially by engaging with librarians who currently track patron needs and research trends and who purchase materials in this modern information landscape.

In a presentation at Atla Annual, Schmersal, van Dyk, and McMahan (2018) outlined the importance of keeping abreast with research trends. They described methods for staying current that ultimately inform collection development practices and meet the needs of their patrons. Van Dyk, through a survey to Atla members via a listserv commonly used by religious studies and theology librarians, found that professional colleagues, academic conferences, and academic journals were the most common ways that librarians kept current with trends in the discipline (143). Through interviews with two graduate students, Schmersal also found that conferences, journals, and peer work, especially expressed via social media, are ways that graduate students monitor research trends. Of most importance to the graduate students with whom Schmersal spoke were filling gaps in journal series, accessing digital tools (such as Omeka), and acquiring materials representing the interdisciplinarity of their work (146). In a field which "is both difficult to define and impossible to categorize neatly or easily" (Alt 1991, 208), library users and librarians have echoed the necessity and challenges of building a comprehensive collection based on the interdisciplinary nature of religion and theology (Alt 1991; Hook 1991, 216; Cooper et al. 2017). Beyond the studies named here, more research should be conducted to identify how religious studies and theology librarians are meeting disciplinary information needs through collection development activities.

## *Methods of Collection Development*

A variety of suggested techniques for developing a collection emerge from literature spanning decades. Many of the techniques published in older texts are still relevant to today's librarian. A special issue of "Library acquisitions: Practice and theory" from 1991, which focused on religion and theology collection development, outlined collection development practices such as creating and using a collection development policy to guide purchasing decisions (Alt 1991), considering the level of financial support in determining the scope of the collection

(Alt 1991; Hook 1991), consulting sources that provide book reviews (e.g., *Choice*), and turning to others, including comparing catalogs at other peer institutions and consulting professional organizations where association publications and individual colleagues may provide recommendations about which titles to purchase (Alt 1991). While Hook (1991) broadly had negative experiences with approval plans in a theological library context, Alt (1991, 212) cites approval plans as a good way to "receive many titles automatically." Hook communicates the enormity of the task of selecting and purchasing materials and how overwhelming collection development can be without effective automated mechanisms for acquiring new titles. He states that "[t]he prospect for reviewing the multitudes of publishers' catalogs, advertisements, professional journals, and so forth for newly published titles in religion is a daunting one" (Hook 1991, 216). Yet this remains a common strategy for librarians and, indeed, Alt (1991) recommends reviewing publisher's catalogs, especially those associated with a specific geographic or denominational perspective. Seemingly timeless, reviewing publisher catalogs, vendor services, book reviews, and other sources (especially websites) that curate lists of recommended titles is a suggested method treated by Gregory (2019) in chapters entitled "Selection Sources and Processes" and "Acquisitions." Additionally, the importance of creating collection development policies, "which serve as blueprints" and support the library in "acquiring, organizing, and managing library materials" (Gregory 2019, 29), is echoed beyond this special issue from 1991 throughout the literature, including in two book chapters focused on special collections and archival and manuscript collecting in a volume commemorating Atla's 50th anniversary (Graham et al. 1996) and, most recently, in a full chapter in the second edition of Gregory's (2019) *Collection Development and Management for 21st Century Library Collections*.

Little (2013) encourages readers to consider collection development in ways that align with the Association of Theological Schools' (ATS) accreditation standards. In a book chapter that provides a comprehensive overview of how librarians, especially early-career librarians, can build collections that support theology graduate school programs–a very specific setting and patron population–Little (2013, 113) emphasizes the importance of the accreditation, stating that "those seeking to be ordained… must hold a degree from an institution accredited by the" ATS. The ATS's *Standards of Accreditation* centers teaching and learning around the library and states that "[t]he library is a central resource for theological scholarship and education" (ATS Commission on Accrediting 2015, 10). The preeminent accrediting body of the theological field indicates that the library and its collection are of critical importance to the intellectual formation and professional success of theological school graduates. Little (2013, 113) suggests that, regardless of level of experience, librarians should refer to the *Standards of*

*Accreditation* as a resource to inform their collection development practices. The primary audience for this book chapter seems to be librarians who are new to the field and to collection development responsibilities. Little addresses the evolution of formats of materials relevant to the field, acknowledging that, currently, the accessibility of materials in an electronic format is commonplace (115). The chapter provides a valuable introduction to theological resources. Little names specific resources that would be valuable to the collection and describes the variety of formats (e.g., print materials, e-books, CD-ROMs, etc.), the diverse nature of content types (e.g., concordances, dictionaries, Biblical commentaries, etc.), and the nature of the content (e.g., sacred texts, scholarly secondary resources) that should be included in a theological library. In the context of subscribing to journals, and arguably for the acquisition of any library material, Little states that "the librarian must always have the program's curriculum in mind, as well as current specializations within the curriculum or historical collecting and research interests" (120). Although many of these materials and strategies are also applicable in a secular religious studies library, some, such as collecting texts about church administration and ensuring a breadth of materials from a specific Christian denomination, would be less relevant in this context. The strategies Little mentions are especially helpful for those developing a collection in an institution affiliated with or focused on Christianity. Beyond Christianity, Little does include a paragraph about other faith traditions, citing ATS standards requiring accredited libraries to include "basic texts from other religious traditions" (ATS Commission on Accrediting 2015, 10), whereas a secular library or a library serving a religious studies program would have not only these basic texts but a larger collection of texts related to each religious tradition.

In addition to the more traditional methods already discussed, a few stood out as more creative and appropriate for the current information landscape. Shirkey (2011) collected 98 syllabi from a variety of humanities fields, including religion, and framed the study as a user-centered method that can "generate items for inclusion in the library's collection" (157), ultimately benefiting "the collection, the librarian, and the library as a whole" (154). At the time of writing, Shirkey could only identify three other studies that used syllabi as an aspect of collection development. This case study demonstrated that 68% of the 936 required or supplementary texts were held in the library, indicating that librarians responsible for purchasing materials could review syllabi to be more aware of core course-related needs and order titles to fill these needs. McMahan (2018) emphasized the importance of social media as a way for librarians to stay current in the field. She described social media as "a promising avenue for discovering new publications and emerging trends in a given area of research," focusing specifically on using social media as a tool "to find resources to build collections in a new research

area" (147). Included in this presentation were extensive lists of scholars to follow on Twitter and links to podcasts, blogs, and more that would help new and experienced librarians alike to gain ideas for resources to add to their collections.

## *Identifying Current Collection Development Trends*

As described, there are a variety of ways through which librarians engage in collection development activities, all while balancing purchasing priorities and patron needs. This section describes a study conducted in December 2019–January 2020 and discusses broader trends in the current religious studies and theology collection development landscape.

### *Research Questions*

The purpose of the study is to explore how library professionals responsible for acquiring materials related to the fields of religious studies and theology at institutions of higher education in the United States and Canada engage in collection development activities. The researchers posed the following questions:

- What methods do religious studies and theology librarians use to purchase library materials?
- What are religious studies and theology collection development trends in the United States and Canada?

To answer these questions, the researchers developed a survey to send to librarians responsible for collecting in these disciplines.

### *Recruitment & Respondents*

In fall 2019, the researchers developed a list of librarians employed at 114 public and private academic Association of Research Libraries (ARL) member libraries presumed to have collection development responsibilities for the disciplines of religious studies or theology. At times, we listed multiple individuals from the same institution, especially if one was listed as a subject specialist for religious studies and another as a subject specialist for Judaism, for example. Of the 114 ARL institutions, we could not find information for a religious studies-related librarian at nine institutions. Across the remaining 105 institutions, and accounting for

multiple librarians who may have religion- or theology-related collection development responsibilities, our total list consisted of 142 ARL librarians. The researchers emailed a survey (see appendix) in December 2019 to these ARL librarians and, in January 2020, to the 595 members subscribing to the Atlantis listserv (T. Burgess, pers. comm., January 10, 2020)–a listserv used by religious studies and theology librarians who are not necessarily employed at ARL institutions. Recipients were invited to forward the recruitment email with a link to the survey to others within their institution who may be more well-suited to respond to collection development practices in religious studies and theology. This methodology means that we are unsure of the exact number of recipients with access to the survey.

The survey was open for 3.5 weeks and one reminder email was sent to the list of ARL librarians and to the Atlantis listserv. A total of 86 librarians who clicked the survey link and who were eligible completed the survey. Seven additional librarians began the survey, but were deemed ineligible and filtered out based on the first two questions which asked respondents to confirm that they are responsible for collection development to support the study of religion or theology at their institution and that their institution is located in the United States or Canada.

Respondents answered a maximum of 22 survey questions, including multiple choice, rank order, and open text box questions that provided rich contextual information. Some questions were only made visible to some respondents based on previous responses, and the researchers decided not to require respondents to answer any of the questions except the first two, which determined eligibility.

Of the 78 respondents who answered the question "At what stage are you in your career?" the majority of respondents (37.2%, n = 29) identified themselves as mid-career (see figure 1). A significant number of respondents are experienced librarians, with half of all respondents (48.8%, n = 39) identifying themselves as either advanced career librarians (23.1%, n = 18) or nearing retirement (26.9%, n = 21).

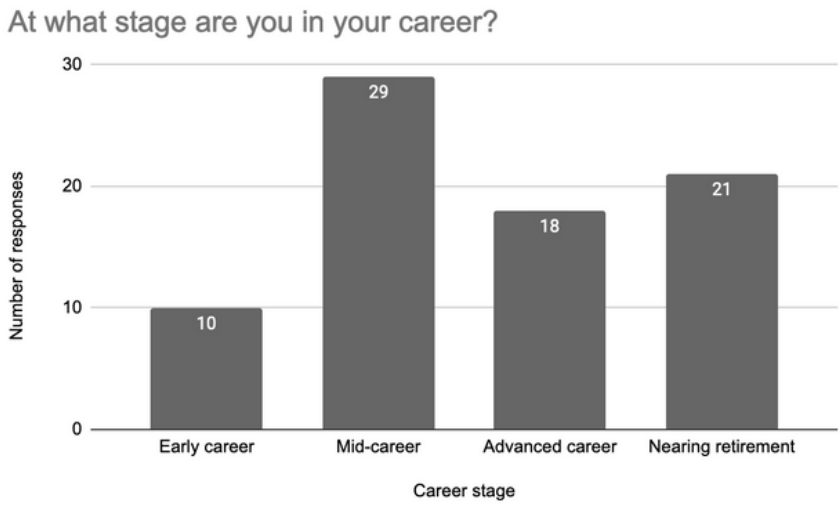


Figure 1: Represents the results of question 15.

A slight majority of 78 respondents identified their institutional affiliation as a public university or college (28.2%, n = 22) while 21 respondents (26.9%) identified that they are employed at a stand-alone seminary (see figure 2). While we did not ask respondents to identify the name of their institution or whether or not it is an ARL member library, these responses may indicate a good distribution of participation from librarians at both ARL libraries and those recruited from the Atlantis listserv. We acknowledge that one's institutional affiliation may look different from the options we provided, so we allowed respondents to tell us about their institutional affiliation in an open text field. The majority of the six people who chose "other" indicated that their institution was a combination of the options we offered. We also offered respondents the opportunity to report if their institution is affiliated with a specific religious tradition and denomination, and 44 respondents identified their institution's affiliations using an open text box. The researchers coded 42 of these as Christian and two respondents specifically identified their institutions as "inter-religious."

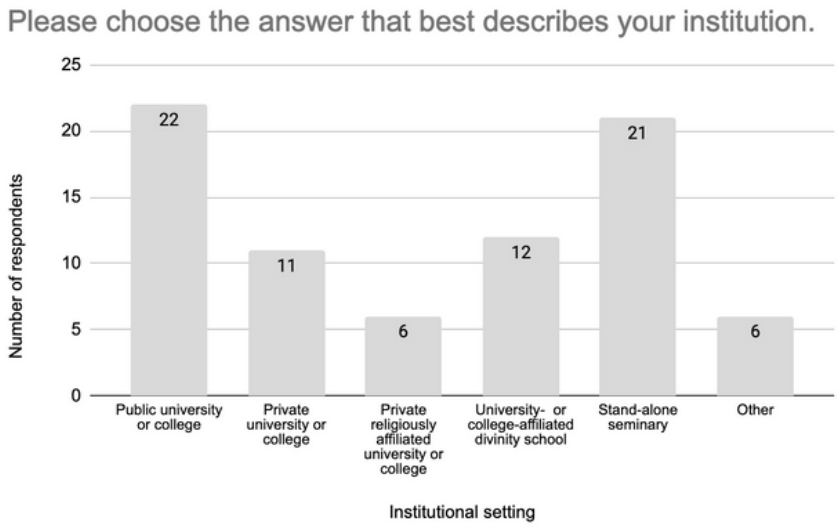


Figure 2: Represents the results of question 16.

Additionally, we wanted to gather information about the nature of religious studies and theological programs at their institutions and the student body with whom the respondents work. Most institutions (32.5%, n = 26) reported a total institutional enrollment (including undergraduates and graduates) of less than 1,000 students. Interestingly, the next most popular responses represented institutions at very different ends of the size spectrum: thirteen respondents (16.3%) reported that their school has between 1,001 and 5,000 students, and twelve respondents (15%) reported that their school has more than 35,000 students. It is important to note that the majority of respondents (58.8%, n = 47) come from schools with a total enrollment of 10,000 students or less.

More respondents (66) reported on the number of graduate students seeking degrees in religious studies or theology than those who shared the number of undergraduates seeking degrees (54 respondents). The majority of respondents (35.2%, n = 19) indicated that the number of undergraduate students seeking degrees in religious studies or theology is less than 25 students. Looking at those who reported that their institution grants graduate degrees, the majority (50%, n = 33) indicated that they have over 100 students seeking these degrees. In one of the last questions (question 21), we asked respondents to choose, from a list of nine, which degrees are offered at their institutions, while allowing respondents the ability to check all that apply. The top three most common degrees chosen were Master of Arts (MA) (20.7%, n = 54), Bachelor of Arts (BA) (18%, n = 47), and Master of Divinity (MDiv) (17.2%, n = 45).

# Findings

In addition to inquiring about professional and institutional contexts, several survey questions asked respondents to indicate their primary means of gathering ideas for purchasing resources. Questions about methods of collection development included multiple response questions (questions 8 and 10), ranked choice questions (questions 9 and 11), and an open field question (question 7). Asking multiple response questions and ranked choice questions was an intentional aspect of the survey design as a way to reaffirm collection development methods that respondents had provided earlier in the survey through the open field question, while providing opportunities for them to expand beyond these primary techniques and offer other strategies that they employ. This section illuminates these responses and seeks to identify current collection development practices across the field.

## Collection Development Funding

A total of 61 respondents answered that yes, the collections budget they receive satisfies the needs of religious studies or theology faculty and students at their institution (question 6; see figure 3). However, among the 45 comments respondents provided, 16 of these individuals indicated that they would buy more materials if they could. One respondent succinctly captured a theme among many respondents by saying, "We keep up with the necessities, but not luxuries." Five respondents indicated that donors or endowed gift funds allowed collection development needs to be met. Aside from collections budgets, two respondents specifically identified interlibrary loan (ILL) as meeting their information access needs, and two other responses stated that they rely on consortial purchases and couriers. Interestingly, three respondents stated that they have no budget specifically dedicated to religious studies or theology, and five respondents shared that they have a healthy budget that, for one respondent, "more than satisfies the needs."

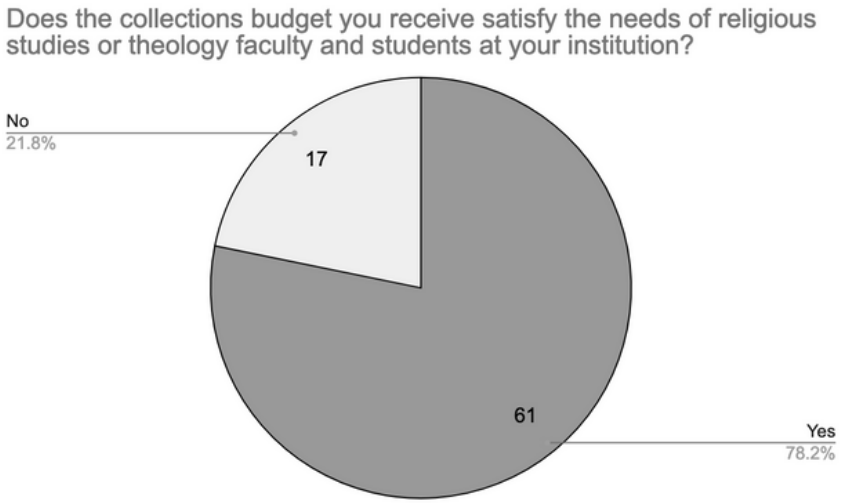


Figure 3: Represents the results of question 6.

Of the 17 respondents who said that their collections budget is not satisfying faculty and student needs, nine of them specifically stated they need more funds, and four explicitly stated that they are not meeting patron needs. Two respondents indicated that their funding has decreased in the recent past. One said, "As far as I know [we are meeting patron needs], however in the last ten years our collections budget in general has decreased significantly. I am sure they have noticed, but like much of campus, we are making do." Another respondent quantified the decrease in their collection development funds saying they have experienced "more than 50% budget reduction in the past 7 years." Three respondents also mentioned ILL as a means of meeting patron needs.

## *Methods of Collection Development*

Prior to providing a list of answers from which respondents could choose, the researchers wanted to gather responses from an open-ended question (question 7): When considering possible acquisitions to the religious studies/theology collection, what is the primary method by which you discover relevant materials to add to the collection? With a total of 79 responses, this was a valuable question to ask as a way for respondents to focus on the purpose of the survey and especially because consecutive questions did not contain an exhaustive list of possible collection development methods.

Coding these responses revealed that faculty input and requests were the most frequently mentioned method by which respondents discovered relevant materials to add to the collection (n = 28) (see figure 4). Respondents also gathered suggestions from students (n = 8) and four respondents generated purchase ideas from patron requests in general. These patron requests could include faculty or students, but respondents did not specify these patrons in their responses. One respondent explained how they gather recommendations from faculty and students stating that they gather this information at "[q]uarterly and or annual meetings with faculty and students." The prevalence of faculty input and requests demonstrate that, among patron-motivated requests, faculty, rather than students, are setting the tone for collecting materials.

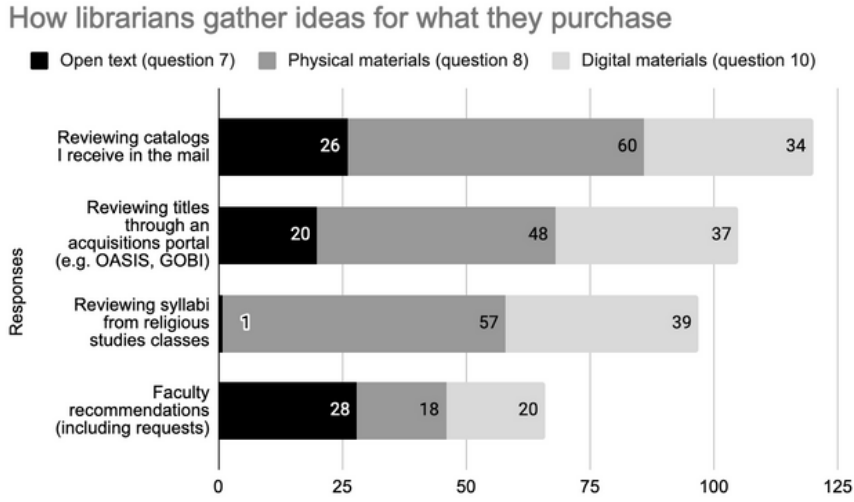


Figure 4: Represents themes coded from responses to question 7, juxtaposed with responses to questions 8 and 10.

Respondents were typically methodical in the way they approached collection development, indicating that they used acquisition tools (such as OASIS and GOBI) (n = 20), approval plans (some of which could have been through a platform such as OASIS or GOBI, however these were not explicitly named) (n = 9), reviewing publisher's catalogs (n = 26), and checking social media (n = 4). However, one respondent replied that their primary method of discovering materials was "serendipity."

## Collecting Physical Materials

The most common way respondents identified gathering ideas about physical materials to purchase was by reviewing catalogs they received in the mail (n = 60) (see figure 4). The next most popular responses were reviewing syllabi from religious studies or theology courses (n = 57) and reviewing titles that match a pre-established profile through an acquisitions portal (such as ProQuest OASIS or GOBI) (n = 48). In addition to respondents choosing among a list of answers provided by the researchers, they could also describe other methods by which they gather ideas for purchase suggestions of physical materials. Respondents had the opportunity to choose "Other" and type their own responses in an open text field. Forty-two respondents chose to type their own responses. Popular responses included gathering purchase ideas from faculty requests (n = 18) and student recommendations (n = 8). Some novel responses included: hearing about books on Catholic radio and denominational news sources, a "cataloguer letting me know that we're missing volumes from a series," faculty reading (with one bemused, yet frustrated, respondent asking "WHY don't they tell me what they're reading!!??"), sermons and guest speakers on campus, and usage and turn-away statistics. When asked to rank the ways that they gather ideas about what physical items to purchase (question 9), respondents overwhelmingly chose "Reviewing titles that match a pre-established profile through an acquisitions portal (e.g., Proquest OASIS, GOBI)."

## Collecting Digital Materials

The researchers were interested to learn if collection development practices differed based on the physical or digital format of the materials, particularly how librarians gathered ideas for purchasing each. There was a difference between the two, though librarians ranked methods similarly. The most popular method by which librarians reported gathering ideas to purchase digital materials was reviewing syllabi from religious studies classes (n = 39) (see figure 4)–the second most popular method for considering physical materials. The next most popular method for considering the purchase of digital materials was also a popular consideration for the purchase of physical materials–reviewing titles that match a pre-established profile through an acquisitions portal (such as ProQuest OASIS or GOBI) (n = 37). The most popular method for librarians to gather ideas for physical materials–reviewing catalogs they receive in the mail–was the third most popular method for librarians to consider purchasing digital materials (n = 34).

Forty-one respondents chose "other" and described additional considerations and their specific contexts. Like in the responses for sourcing ideas for physical materials, respondents also commonly referenced sourcing digital material recommendations from their patrons. These included faculty requests (n = 20), student requests (n = 4), and patron recommendations (where the respondent did not specify either faculty or student) (n = 3). Similar to results for the question about physical materials, two respondents said that they look to other libraries' holdings for ideas of digital materials to purchase. However, where consortial purchasing was not mentioned for physical materials, two respondents identified the importance of consortial purchasing for digital formats. One respondent specifically mentioned the importance of their e-book packages through the Association of Christian Libraries. Also, notably different from gathering ideas to purchase physical materials, respondents gathered ideas based on listservs, including the "Atla discussion list" (n = 3) and through patron-driven or demand-driven acquisition models (n = 3). Between mentions of consortial agreements, colleagues' suggestions, and generating purchase ideas from listservs, responses indicate that librarians may be more dependent upon, or simply more open to, collaborative collecting of digital materials.

Respondents also used this open text field to describe challenges to subscribing to digital content and funding annual fees. One respondent indicated they pay less attention to digital materials overall, stating, "I don't tend to order e-books, and databases are too expensive to justify," while another wrote that ordering digital materials is based on funding:

> When I can get funding for a larger purchase, some of the Brill encyclopedias, such as *Textual History of the Bible Online*; *Encyclopedia of Jewish History and Culture* are core. I cannot pay for anything that has a substantial annual maintenance or subscription fee.

Whether due to cost, patron preferences, or user needs, one respondent stated that they "rarely buy individual e-books and rarely subscribe to a new database."

## *Challenges of Acquisitions Tools*

Coming from a university setting that uses Proquest OASIS as a means of both discovering print and e-book titles to purchase and actually making that purchase, we were interested in learning what obstacles other librarians face in using an acquisitions tool such as Proquest OASIS or GOBI. For those who, for either question 8 or 10, did not choose the option "Reviewing titles that match a pre-established profile through an acquisitions portal (e.g., Proquest OASIS, GOBI)" as

a means of gathering ideas for titles to purchase, we asked respondents to comment on what prevents them from using such tools (question 12). Forty responses were recorded and, of those, 17 actually said that they do use an acquisition tool. GOBI was more popular, with 15 respondents using it. OASIS was much less popular, with only three respondents disclosing that they use it, and all three of those users also using GOBI. There was an overall familiarity with GOBI, where even those who did not use an acquisitions tool mentioned it by name, but there was a lack of use and familiarity with OASIS, including two of the 40 respondents, who had not heard of that product. Of the 17 respondents who do use an acquisitions tool such as GOBI or OASIS, five mentioned that they only use it for processing or ordering specific materials and not to generate ideas for purchases. Users also often disclosed an exception to their use of such a tool. For example, one respondent said that they cannot order books from Israel because they are not available through GOBI, and another stated, "I do use it in some limited ways but not for e-resources."

Barriers to use included lack of time to gain familiarity with these tools (n = 4), and eight respondents commented that they did not see a need to use these tools. Reflecting this, one respondent stated, "I don't feel they are needed at this time. I am comfortable with how I have been doing it." Some respondents said that using these tools is "not worth it." Six responses were coded as such and, alluding to a dimension of complexity, included comments such as "[it's] too much hassle to set it up" and "it seems to add another layer to the process that doesn't need to be there." Another barrier to using these tools is cost. Five respondents expressed that these tools are too expensive, one going so far to say that "they overcharge for their services." One notable response mentioned cost and issues that contributed to a change in their workflow. They said, "We used GOBI in the past. However, since we order books via Amazon, we could not justify the cost of GOBI. We also had some issues with the GOBI alerts." A few other respondents mentioned challenges to using these products effectively, stating that "they are not user friendly," and one librarian stated that the tool they used "never worked well for my predecessors and I was unable to get it to work well." Though these responses expressed strong opinions, only four respondents expressed difficulty in using an acquisitions tool.

## *Additional Considerations…*

### …about Collection Development Practices

After collecting answers to respondents' primary means of gathering ideas to inform purchases, the researchers wanted to provide an opportunity for librarians to share any additional comments about their collection development practices (question 14). The 32 responses varied greatly, but a few themes and individual responses are worth noting here.

Several respondents (n = 4) commented on the evolution of collection development. One indicated that their approach to collecting has shifted from a "just in case" model to "more of a 'just in time' model" where they "heavily depend on ILL, syllabi, and faculty for purchase suggestions." Another respondent acknowledged that expense is an issue and described changes in collecting as a result of needing to "decrease costs as much as possible," and how this is very "different from ten or 20 years ago." An environment where expense is a prominent concern may also motivate responses such as this one, from a librarian who uses statistics to rationalize purchases: "Based on analysis of circulations and usage, we know that we should buy much more in Bible and homiletical prep than in, say, historical theology or church history. Usage matters greatly in how I select new materials." One librarian noted that, in the current purchasing landscape, acquisition may be driven directly by patrons themselves with "Print and Electronic Demand Driven" models where "patrons can order without Librarian mediation." Another respondent, after answering the question about using acquisition tools (question 12), took the opportunity to emphasize that "there is a whole world out there that GOBI does not supply. Harrasowitz and Aux Amateurs have interesting material. I used to select from them and from Casalini before funding plummeted. Israeli publications are also pertinent and excellent. They are not covered in GOBI."

While eight respondents stated they rely heavily on faculty requests, several expanded and provided insight on the nature of engaging them. These librarians provided glimpses into their relationships with faculty. One respondent mentioned sending personalized emails several times within a year "asking for their input on specific titles and encouraging them to suggest other ones," and another mentioned that they previously used an approval plan through GOBI, but opted out of it and "now mainly handle faculty requests." Additionally, discussions with faculty yielded a greater understanding of faculty needs, however, these needs can look very different depending on the institution. From one respondent's experience, "[w]hen I ask faculty whether I should buy the print book or the ebook, they invariably prefer print," yet another librarian at a different institution stated that "most monographs we buy are e-books." Another respondent indicated an

overall trend gathered from their faculty, stating that "[t]here is less of a push for individual titles and more wishes for databases and electronic journals." Although answers throughout the survey have indicated that faculty requests are an important way to gather ideas for purchases, it is important to acknowledge that librarian-disciplinary faculty relationships differ between institutions. For some, building relationships with faculty is an ongoing process and it can be challenging to gain faculty buy-in. One respondent stated that, although they receive "a lot of feedback from faculty," their "biggest struggle… is getting faculty to send me book requests."

Leveraging relationships may also be present internally as librarians navigate administrative priorities and purchasing workflows. Two librarians specifically noted that administrative barriers impact their collection development practices, where one librarian's "administration has made it clear that instruction and reference are more important, so I don't devote a ton of time to it," and another respondent stated that their "practices are hampered by some profound misunderstandings on the part of institutional administrators." Other librarians, such as this respondent who disclosed they are a part of an affiliate library, must engage additional colleagues as "large journal subscriptions are handled through the main university's library (as they have more buying power)."

Two additional notable responses are grounded in librarianship values of access and inquiry. One librarian expressed a desire to problem-solve issues of access, stating that they "[w]ould love to figure out how to turn some required course reserve material into ebooks when they are not available in that format from the publisher or out of print but still in copyright." Mirroring the ACRL's (2016) *Framework for Information Literacy*, which suggests that librarians and students alike view inquiry as engaging in scholarly conversations, another respondent stated that their collection development practice is grounded in "a deep understanding of the theological conversation over time."

### …about Professional or Institutional Contexts

As with question 14, the researchers wanted to give respondents ample opportunity to describe their own unique circumstances by asking if they had any additional comments to add about their professional or institutional contexts (question 22). Many (n = 28) provided a more nuanced glimpse into their own settings, sharing more information on the population they serve, historical facts about their settings, and the structure of religious studies/theology at their institutions. Three respondents specifically commented on the interdisciplinary nature of the field: one mentioned a relationship with their philosophy department on campus; another stated that "Religious studies is actually a program at my university, not a department, so all our faculty are affiliated with some other

department (soc, history, classics, etc);" and a third respondent detailed how the faith-based curriculum "places a high priority on faith integration across the disciplines," driving the collection development not only of theological materials, but also of "select theological resources related to a broad-range of academic disciplines." The second respondent mentioned the complexity of interdisciplinarity when it intersects with collection development, stating that "book ordering [is] complicated because faculty don't always think to contact me when their main liaison is in one of those other disciplines."

Interestingly, two respondents specifically named the presence of young disciplinary faculty as a source of hope for the growth of the field on their campus, with each of them stating that, although they currently do not offer a graduate program, they expect they will before long. In contrast, two other respondents focused on the broader landscape of information and higher education, offering more pessimistic views, with both comments relating to funding. One respondent stated, that "[w]e live in an information rich society that cannot afford to fund theological education," while another offered that "religion tends to be in the humanities part of universities. The humanities are not doing well these days, not in enrollments and not in university funding."

Three respondents indicated that they did not know the number of students pursuing undergraduate religious studies degrees at their institutions. This raises questions about the prevalence of this institutional data (one respondent stated that this number was not published) and methods librarians use to become familiar with and address the needs of their students.

## *Limitations and Further Areas of Inquiry*

While this study broadly captured the current collection development practices of religious studies and theology librarians, it is important to note a few limitations of the study that may prevent the full realization of this goal.

First, the scope of this study could be expanded. We focused on recruiting librarians through the Atlantis listserv and by reviewing a list of ARL institutions. Recruiting through professional organizations, such as the Association of Christian Librarians (whose librarian members may or may not subscribe to the Atlantis listserv), or engaging in a more thorough review of institutions of higher education, especially with less of a research focus, in the United States and Canada could have been helpful. Additionally, we could have systematically gone through the listing of 278 ATS-accredited schools to research the librarians employed there and contacted them directly (similar to our recruitment of ARL librarians). Broader participation may have garnered more insight into collection development trends.

Additionally, aside from the first two questions, we did not require respondents to answer questions. Not answering every question resulted in a more limited understanding of professional and institutional contexts. For example, we did not require respondents to indicate their institution's religious affiliation, nor did we force respondents to share if they were from an ARL library or otherwise. Ultimately, this decision meant that not every respondent answered every question, especially the open text questions which invited participants to share more individualized experiences. We were grateful that, in one of these open text questions, many respondents chose to add the fact that they gather collection development ideas from patrons, especially through faculty and student requests. While this is an obvious and commonly used collection development method and we should have included it in our list of options, the impossibility of making available an exhaustive list of responses in questions 8 and 10 was complemented by the respondents who did choose to answer open text questions.

Although we attempted to present a comprehensive list of religious studies- or theology-related degrees as responses to question 21, respondents provided even more degree options in the open text question 22. One respondent stated, "We also offer these degrees: MA Christian leadership; MA Religion; MDiv/MA Counseling; MDiv/MA Conflict transformation; MDiv/MA Restorative justice," while another simply listed additional degrees offered: "Doctor of Missiology; Masters in Pastoral Ministry; Religious Education."

Future studies could investigate additional themes relevant to the ever-evolving field of librarianship. For example, we did not ask participants to identify how the open access movement is impacting their collection development practices. This is a major area of further research that should be studied. Additionally, especially as Atla membership expands around the world, it would be interesting to collect data from libraries located beyond the United States and Canada. Collecting this data would illuminate international collection development concerns and priorities, and it would allow for comparison of collection development trends on an international basis. Relatedly, it would be interesting to further explore the implications of distance education on collection development trends, especially considering this response to question 22: "We teach DMin and Master of Arts in Youth Ministry in 'intensive' mode. Most of the time, these students are on campus (or in the same state). This fact informs format decisions (get an e-book versus buy print)." Considering that some librarians stated that their patrons prefer print and others indicated that their patrons prefer electronic resources over print, information consumption and use trends should continue to be monitored and periodically studied.

## Conclusion

The vast experience of the librarians who responded to the survey resulted in a current snapshot of the many ways religious studies and theology librarians engage in collection development practices. Further research on how these collection development practices align with the current needs of religious studies and theology scholars and students can be explored and used to inform professional development for librarians of all career stages. Awareness of a variety of trends is especially important to early career librarians who may be inexperienced in collection development and also able to think of new ways to identify and meet patron needs.

* * *

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# *Appendix 5A: Survey Instrument*

## *Collection Development Trends of Religious Studies and Theology Librarians*

Thank you for participating in this research study! The researchers are interested in learning about religious studies and theological collection development trends in libraries in institutions of higher education throughout the United States and Canada.

1) Are you responsible for purchasing materials to support the study of religion or theology at your institution? (Y - next question/N; If No - end survey)

2) Is your institution located in the United States or Canada? (Y/N; If No - end survey)

### Collection Development Practices

This first set of questions asks you to consider your institutional context and your own collection development practices as they relate to the purchase of religious studies or theology materials.

3) How do you fund the purchase of materials that support religious studies or theological scholarship? (check all that apply)

- ▢ a) Library's collections budget
- ▢ b) Disciplinary faculty fund purchases
- ▢ c) Institutional grants
- ▢ d) External grants
- ▢ e) Donors

▢ f) Other: _____

4) At your institution, what is the collections budget that supports religious studies or theological scholarship?

▢ Less than $1,000
▢ $1,001 – $5,000
▢ $5,001 – $10,000
▢ $10,001 – $15,000
▢ $15,001 – $20,000
▢ More than $20,000

5) Are funds for one-time purchases distinct from funds that support subscription-based resources (e.g., journals)?

▢ Yes
▢ No

6) Does the collections budget you receive satisfy the needs of religious studies or theology faculty and students at your institution?

▢ Yes, please comment: _____
▢ No, please comment: _____

7) When considering possible acquisitions to the religious studies/theology collection, what is the primary method by which you discover relevant materials to add to the collection?

Thinking about the acquisition of *physical materials* (e.g., books, DVDs), please respond to the following:

8) I gather ideas for what I should purchase from (check all that apply):

▢ a) Reviewing syllabi from religious studies classes
▢ b) Reviewing titles that match a pre-established profile through an acquisitions portal (e.g., Proquest OASIS, GOBI)
▢ c) Reviewing catalogs I receive in the mail
▢ d) Reviewing catalogs that disciplinary faculty give to me
▢ e) Reviewing lists of titles curated by vendors
▢ f) Attending discipline-specific conferences (e.g., AAR/SBL)
▢ g) Attending library conferences (e.g., Charleston conference, Atla Annual)
▢ h) Direct communications (emails or phone calls) from vendors
▢ i) Direct communications (emails or phone calls) from authors
▢ j) Reviewing books for a publication or professional organization (e.g., for Choice Reviews)

▢ k) Other (please describe): _____

9) Follow up from previous question: Please rank each of the ways you gather ideas (most frequent to least frequent)

Thinking about the acquisition of *digital materials* (e.g., eBooks, databases), please respond to the following:

10) I gather ideas for what I should purchase from (check all that apply):

▢ a) Reviewing syllabi from religious studies classes
▢ b) Reviewing titles that match a pre-established profile through an acquisitions portal (e.g., Proquest OASIS, GOBI)
▢ c) Reviewing catalogs I receive in the mail
▢ d) Reviewing catalogs that disciplinary faculty give to me
▢ e) Reviewing lists of titles curated by vendors
▢ f) Attending discipline-specific conferences (e.g., AAR/SBL)
▢ g) Attending library conferences (e.g., Charleston conference, Atla Annual)
▢ h) Direct communications (emails or phone calls) from vendors
▢ i) Direct communications (emails or phone calls) from authors
▢ j) Other (please describe):

11) Follow up from previous question: Please rank each of the ways you gather ideas (most frequent to least frequent).

12) If b is unselected in 8 and 10: What prevents you from using acquisitions tools such as OASIS or GOBI?

13) How do you gather purchase suggestions from library patrons? (check all that apply)

▢ a) Through personal communication (e.g., email request, hallway conversations)
▢ b) I maintain a purchase request submission form
▢ c) My institution maintains a purchase request submission form
▢ d) When faculty request items to be purchased for course reserves
▢ e) I circulate vendor catalogs among disciplinary faculty
▢ f) Other (please describe): _____

14) Do you have any additional comments about your collection development practices that you would like to add?

## Professional & Institutional Context

This final set of questions asks you to describe your professional and institutional context.

15) At what stage are you in your career?

- ▢ Early career
- ▢ Mid-career
- ▢ Advanced career
- ▢ Nearing retirement

16) Please choose the answer which best describes your institution below:

- ▢ Public university or college
- ▢ Private university or college
- ▢ Private religiously affiliated university or college
- ▢ University- or college-affiliated divinity school
- ▢ Stand-alone seminary
- ▢ Other: _____

17) What is the total enrollment (undergraduate and graduate) at your institution?

- ▢ Less than 1,000
- ▢ 1,001 - 5,000
- ▢ 5,001 - 10,000
- ▢ 10,001 - 15,000
- ▢ 15,001 - 20,000
- ▢ 20,001 - 25,000
- ▢ 25,001 - 30,000
- ▢ 30,001 - 35,000
- ▢ More than 35,000

18) Which, if any, religious tradition and denomination is your institution affiliated with:

- ▢ Open text box: _____
- ▢ Not applicable

19) What is the approximate number of undergraduate students seeking degrees in religious studies or theology at your institution?

- ▢ Less than 25
- ▢ 26–50
- ▢ 51–100

- ▢ More than 100
- ▢ Not applicable

20) What is the approximate number of graduate students seeking degrees in religious studies or theology at your institution?

- ▢ Less than 25
- ▢ 26–50
- ▢ 51–100
- ▢ More than 100
- ▢ Not applicable

21) What are the religious studies or theology degrees granted by your institution (check all that apply):

- ▢ a) PhD - Doctor of Philosophy
- ▢ b) ThD - Doctor of Theology
- ▢ c) DMin - Doctor of Ministry
- ▢ d) MDiv - Master of Divinity
- ▢ e) MATS/MTS - Master of Arts in Theological Studies/Master of Theological Studies
- ▢ f) MA - Master of Arts
- ▢ g) MARS - Master of Arts in Religious Studies
- ▢ h) ThM - Master of Theology
- ▢ i) BA - Bachelor of Arts

22) Do you have any additional comments about your professional or institutional context that you would like to add?

Thank you for completing this survey!

[Submit]

If you would like to receive a summary of the survey results, please enter your email address below. Note that all email addresses will be kept separately from survey responses and they will not be used to identify your answers to our questions.

Email address:

_____