

Assessment of Library Collections
Academic Program Review

Religious Studies

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The five appendices are not on the web site of the Office of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness—but may be requested from the library.

SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES

This is the first program review in which the library and the academic unit have collaborated from the beginning to assess and then restructure the collections. The primary problem was the widening gap between (a) the department's need for books that are outside the American and British publisher pool handled by the approval plan and (b) the library's ability to fund that need.

The problem is resolved by a restructuring of FIU's approval plan profile—from approval books to notification slips in three fields for individual title orders—to generate cost-savings of about \$12,000 to be reinvested as follows:

- \$7,000 added to the faculty book-ordering fund—increasing it to \$10,000. This fund will include an approval plan for international orders.
- \$2,000 for each of the next two years for new sound and image resources.
- \$917 for new journals.
- \$2,000 for the ATLAS (American Theological Library Association Serials) database.

As a matter of long-term flexibility, following the expansion of sound and image resources, the department will regain (in FY06) that \$2,000 allotment to reinvest in additional journals or any other library resources.

MAIN REPORT

SCOPE. This review of library resources and budgets for Religious Studies focuses on the book and journal collections, with other categories of library support—electronic resources, sound and image materials, government documents, special collections, Wolfsonian collections, reference services, and resource-sharing arrangements—briefly described. The final section summarizes the outcomes of this report.

There are five appendices. The first shows the former and revised book-acquisitions approval plans; the next two list immediate and long-term journal needs. The last two—a comparison of benchmark library budgets with a graph of inflationary pressures in the scholarly communication system— put the financial situation in broad perspective.

METHOD. As a rule, it is not feasible to make a comprehensive assessment of “all” library resources that may be relevant to a particular program or literature, given the interdisciplinarity of programs and literatures alike, as well as their library budget lines. The method for structuring this situation in the sciences and social sciences—to focus on the core (citation-ranked) journals in a field—is not available in the humanities.¹ Accordingly, the library’s detailed collaboration with the academic unit in this case is a model for the program review process in the humanities generally.

BOOKS

Print. Spreadsheet 1 compares the former and revised book-approval plans for Religious Studies by title counts, subject costs, and proportional coverages of U.S. and U.K book-publishing output with FY02 as the baseline.

The vendor handled a total book output of 2,764 titles in Religious Studies in FY02. Under the former plan, the library was sent automatically 32% (873 titles) of that output. With additional direct orders, the coverage was 34% (940 titles).

¹ The core titles in the sciences and social sciences are ranked in the *Journal Citation Reports (JCR)* database. Its method of citation-impact analysis is based on Bradford’s Law, that most of the important papers in a given field appear in a relatively small set of journals. See Hans Verner Holub et alia, “The Iron Law of Important Articles,” *Southern Economic Journal* 58 (1991): 317-28. *JCR* does not cover the humanities, which lack large-scale, salient patterns of journal interactions because most citations are to books or primary sources. One study found that most articles in the humanities are rarely or never cited (within five years of publication); see David P. Hamilton, “Publishing by—and for?—the Numbers,” *Science* 250 (December 7, 1990): 1331-32; and “Research Papers: Who’s Uncited Now?,” *Science* 251 (January 4, 1991): 25. The practical matter for the library is that evaluations of journal collections in the humanities rely on the advices of faculty.

The revised plan shifts three fields (as defined in the Library of Congress subject classification system)—Doctrinal Theology, Practical Theology, and Denominations—from approval books to notification slips. Faculty review of the lists of books received last year in those fields found that about half of the 321 titles would have been ordered as notification slips. The cost-savings of the revised plan at the outset are about \$12,000, of which \$7,000 will go to the faculty book order fund, increasing it from \$3,000 to \$10,000. This \$10,000 fund will have a tripartite allocation: \$6,000 for direct orders in the three slip-based fields; \$2,000 to establish an international approval plan with South Asia Books; and \$2,000 for ongoing faculty orders.

Under the revised plan, Religious Studies will receive about 20% of U.S. and U.K. book output on an automatic basis (as opposed to 32% under the former plan). Such coverage with additional direct orders will be about 30% (as opposed to 34% under the former plan).

Online Books. Of the total 27,280 *NetLibrary* electronic books owned by the library, 233 titles have variations of *religion* as a subject descriptor and 547 titles have such variations as keyword descriptors. The library does not make title selections but relies on bulk acquisitions through a regional network. The *NetLibrary* portal is at <http://www.fiu.edu/~library/elibrary/ebooks.html>.

JOURNALS

The library's journal fund for Religious Studies has 83 titles (not counting for interdisciplinarity). This list was reviewed by faculty to identify possible titles to cancel, with any cost-savings to be reinvested in new titles, but no such cuts were made. To facilitate the selection of new journals for collection development, lists drawn from various sources were provided.² The selections are in two lists of departmental recommendations: one of immediate new titles amounting to \$917 ([spreadsheet 2](#)), the other of needed titles in the long term ([spreadsheet 3](#)), with start-ups to begin once the sound and image collections have been built up during the next two years.

DATABASES / ONLINE RESOURCES

FIU has about 275 databases and other online resources. The primary ones in Religious Studies are *ATLA* [American Theological Library Association] *Religion Database*; *Arts & Humanities Citation Index*; and *Humanities Abstracts*. Descriptions of these and others of secondary importance are at <http://www.fiu.edu/~library/subjects/religion.html>.

Collection-development initiative: Part of the cost-savings from revision of the book-approval plan will be used to acquire the ATLAS [American Theological Library Association Serials] database (<http://www.atla.com/>). It is an archive of 55 journals, with a planned expansion to 70. Of the 55, FIU subscribes to 20; thus, 35 will be new to the collections. Its annual cost is \$2,000.

² The lists included citation-ranked titles for Ethics and for Anthropology according to the *Journal Citation Reports* database, and unranked lists drawn from the *Arts and Humanities Citation Index* for Religious Studies and for Multidisciplinary Humanities.

GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS

University Park campus is a selective (partial) Federal depository. In addition, it receives a broad range of publications from Florida state and local governmental agencies. Two milestones were reached last year when FIU was granted European Documentation Center status by the European Union (the only such center in the state, other than the University of Florida) and full United Nations depository status. See <http://www.fiu.edu/~library/internet/subjects/govern.html>.

SOUND and IMAGE RESOURCES

Of the library's collection of 14,204 sound and image resources, 241 have *religion* or *religious* as a subject descriptor. Myra Nemeth, head of this collection, will work with Religious Studies on developing such resources with the two allotments of \$2,000 created by the restructuring of the book plan.

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

The library's Special Collections span the disciplines, from the sciences to the humanities, but generally focus on Cuban, Caribbean, and Miami interests. The following collections should be singled out: *Levi Marrero Archives* (Cuban History); *Cuban Exile Archives and History Project*, including the *Cuban Pamphlets Collection*; *Judge Mattie Belle Davis Papers* (the inaugural collection of the *Miami Dade Women's Archives*); *Dana Dorsey Collection* (Miami history) *Marrero Ms Collection* (Cuban History); *William Rio Collection* (Puerto Rican politics); *Papers of Dr. Jan Tucker* (Caribbean education and society); and *Papers of Ralph Renick* (journalism, history of 20th century). Special Collections include comprehensive series on the U.S. Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and the *Colleccion Tabula Americae*.

WOLFSONIAN–FIU MUSEUM

The Wolfsonian–FIU (<http://www.wolfsonian.fiu.edu/>) contains artifacts and print materials primarily of North American and European origin, documenting the post-industrial revolution era through the close of the Second World War. The objects and artifacts in the collection comprise a wide variety of media: furniture, industrial-design objects, glass, ceramics; metalwork, textiles, paintings, posters, architectural drawings, textiles, rare books, periodicals, and printed ephemera. Objects are interpreted to explore key issues in design history—the way design has both altered and been altered by cultural change, industrial innovation, and strategies of persuasion.

RESOURCE–SHARING ARRANGEMENTS

The library belongs to several consortia for interlibrary lending: the State University System, Southeast Florida Library Information Network, Southeastern Library Network, and Association of Southeastern Research Libraries. Of importance for specialized, particularly foreign, resources is the Center for Research Libraries (<http://www.crl.uchicago.edu//index.html>).

REFERENCE SERVICES

Reference services are provided on site, by e-mail, and in real-time chat service in English and Spanish (at <http://www.fiu.edu/~library/services/asklib.html>). An information literacy program serves students' basic library instruction needs at the lower division level, and targets core classes for instruction sessions at the upper division and graduate levels. Consultations for research projects are a faculty- and graduate-level service.

SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES

I. Specific Collections

The restructuring of collections in Religious Studies on a level budget—the downsizing of the book-approval plan to afford more international books, journals, sound and image resources, and a database—is in line with the dual university/library goals to improve research productivity and cost-effectiveness.

This restructuring is a first step toward another goal: a long-term library collection development plan. For Religious Studies, this plan will have at least three aims. One will be to complete the acquisition of needed journals, which amount to about \$3,200. Another will be to expand the book acquisitions plan to include certain additional publishers.³ The third will be to increase core book holdings in line with anticipated departmental growth (new faculty and programs).

II. Benchmark Institutions and Subject Literatures

Once the framework shifts to benchmark library collections and budgets, the need for collection development at FIU to proceed largely on the basis of improved cost-effectiveness is clear-cut. As [spreadsheet 4](#) shows, the library's budgets and collections are, on the whole, average for universities of similar scale (in the \$10M library budget range) and comparable to only a few of the universities selected by FIU for benchmarking purposes. For example, FIU's total library budget and its resource budget are just 70% of those of the benchmark universities—the very situation underlying the university's call for a long-term collection development plan.

III. System and University

On the broadest plane, prospects for collection development following any program review are conditioned by prolongation of inflation in the scholarly system at large. As the accompanying graph ([appendix 5](#)) shows, since the mid-1980s journal expenditures for research libraries as a

³ The North American publishers of interest include W. B. Eerdmans, Augsburg Fortress, Ktav, Pilgrim, and Westminster/John Knox. International publishers include Karnak House, Magnes Press, Deschamps, and Karthala. A cost analysis for the North American group as a whole came to about \$3,000 a year.

group have increased 210% and book expenditures 66%—resulting in the nationwide decline of acquisitions, which precipitated a restructuring of sorts for university presses.⁴

Apart from inflationary pressures “out there,” collection development may become increasingly problematic as a campus resource-allocation process, in face of increasing research and curricular interests, program diversification, and the university’s goals for a broad expansion of new Ph.D. programs. Thus, the importance for each program to advise the library on the specific resources and research services that will best serve its needs cannot be overemphasized.

Mention was made at the outset that the general lack of core-journal indicators in the humanities calls for particularly close faculty-library collaborations for collection assessments—and that the Religious Studies faculty’s full participation in this review may be a model for such assessments in the humanities. There are two prerequisites for this review to become an exemplar.

One is that any reshaping of collections in one program would not have adverse effects for other (cross-disciplinary) programs. In this case, the three fields shifted from book to notification-slip status are not cross-disciplinary, whereas such a shift in another field of Religious Studies, such as Islam, could undercut Middle East area studies. The other prerequisite is keen interest of the academic department in reshaping its collections, with at least one faculty member who takes a leadership role in collaborating with the associate library director for collection management.

⁴ Such restructuring has led to “endangered species” in book publishing—subject areas of declining economic viability for publishers, given the loss of academic libraries as a ready market. Among the “endangered species” are Latin American and other area studies; some fields of History; and Literary Criticism and the Performing Arts. Yet, little is known about the true dimensions of the “endangered species” problem. Clarification may come from a study initiated in 1999 by the Association of American University Presses (AAUP) (<http://aaupnet.org/programs/data.html>). See Karen J. Winkler, “Academic Presses Look to the Internet to Save Scholarly Monographs,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 12, 1997, A18; and “University-Press Group to Study Whether Books in Some Fields Are Disappearing,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 1, 1999, A24.

The first AAUP report, published in 2003, has a different focus: book revenues. It found that Religious Studies in the period 1989-2000 had the highest inflation rate (66.92%) for university presses and a moderate rate (39.60%) for commercial ones. The report’s general conclusion—that in most fields university presses may be “leaving money on the table” by not pricing aggressively enough—does not apply to Religious Studies.