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# Back to Basics

## Collaborating with Colleagues to Connect Graduate Students with Content

By David Schmersal, Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University; Gerrit van Dyk, Brigham Young University; Kaeley McMahan, Wake Forest University

**ABSTRACT** In order to fulfill our mission, theological librarians need to anticipate research needs of graduate students and faculty whose work often entails asking new questions, forming new connections, and seeking new avenues of inquiry that may lie beyond our subject expertise. What low-cost sources and tools are available that allow librarians to monitor research trends in relevant disciplines and thereby prepare ourselves to support those pursuing emerging research trajectories? How do we form the connections with current and incoming graduate students and new faculty that will enable us to anticipate their research needs? Experienced public services librarians will facilitate a conversation to address these and related questions. This session is sponsored by the Public Services Interest Group (PSIG).

### INTRODUCTION: GROWING EDGES

Theological research, like Renaissance cartography, has “growing edges.” By necessity, to further scholarship and to get tenure, graduate students, PhD students, and new faculty often engage in research along these growing edges. This can pose a challenge for theological librarians, who are called to support graduate students and faculty in areas of research that are not (yet) fully known or developed. In the absence of maps, Renaissance navigators compiled “rudders,” descriptions based on firsthand accounts of other navigators and sailors who have “been there” (at least, that is what James Clavell says in *Shogun*). What might a “theological library rudder” look like, and

where might we go to find this firsthand information?

In this session, we explored three avenues of inquiry for addressing these and related questions:

- Surveys of how colleagues stay current
- Building connections with graduate students aspiring to become faculty members
- Social media

## Staying Current in Theology/Religious Studies By Gerrit van Dyk

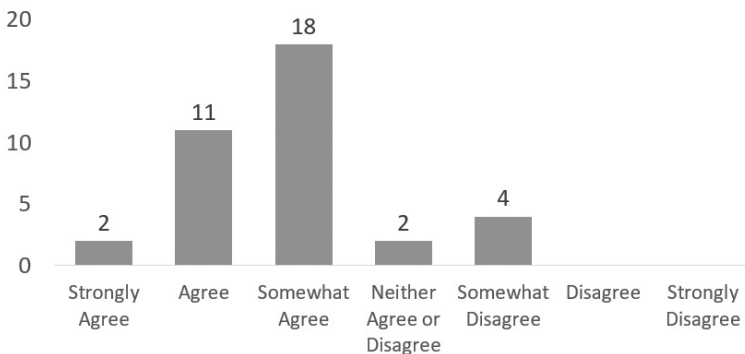
The following is based on a survey offered to theological librarians through the ATLAntis listserv, seeking to answer the following questions:

- How well do we keep up?
- What factors influence keeping up (if any)?
- What are the most used methods of keeping up?

There were 37 respondents.

1. Can we actually keep up?
2. How do our institutions support us?

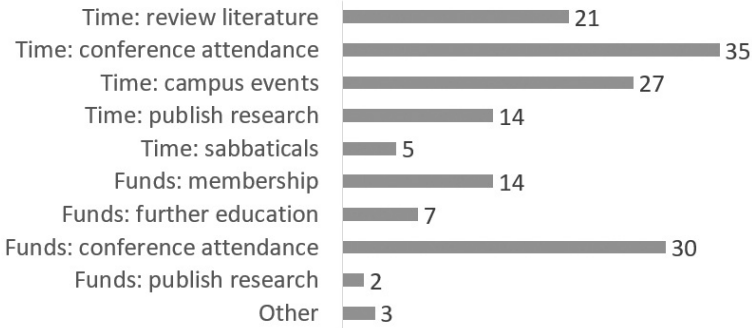
Q: I am able to keep up in Theology/RS



Most respondents' responses suggest they are a bit hazy on their ability.

a. Twenty responses to question three listed academic journals as

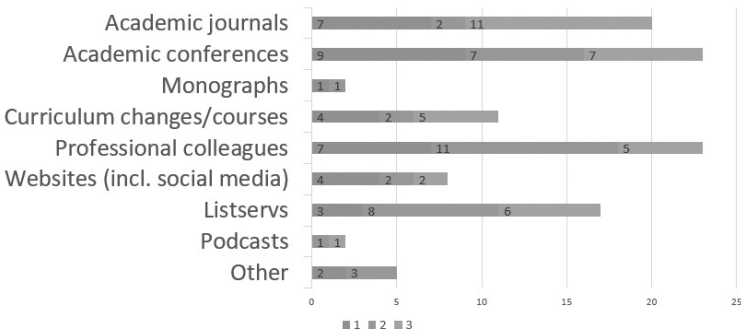
Q: How Does Your Institution Support Prof Dev in Theology/RS?



Notes: “Other”: one respondent said he/she receives institutional support for any of these items; one respondent said that these were possible, but not necessarily provided annually while adding that his/her institution offered a faculty writing retreat for publishing; the third “other” wrote “access to resources,” perhaps indicating he/she can use library resources in personal research and professional development?

3. What tools do you find most helpful in keeping up with trends in theology and religious studies?

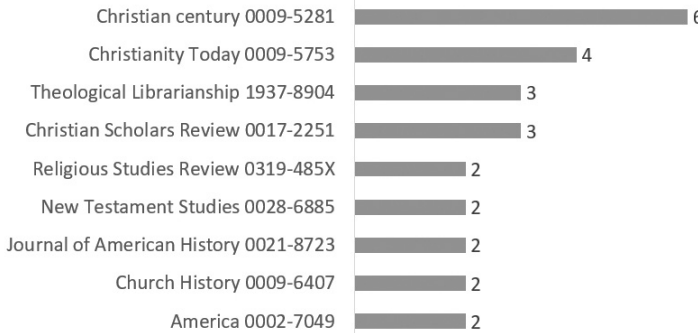
Q: Rank from 1-9 Most to Least Helpful in Keeping up with Theology/RS:



Items listed under “Other” include: Publisher trends based on new books, Twitter, RSS feeds, Publisher catalogs Collection development

one of their top three choices:

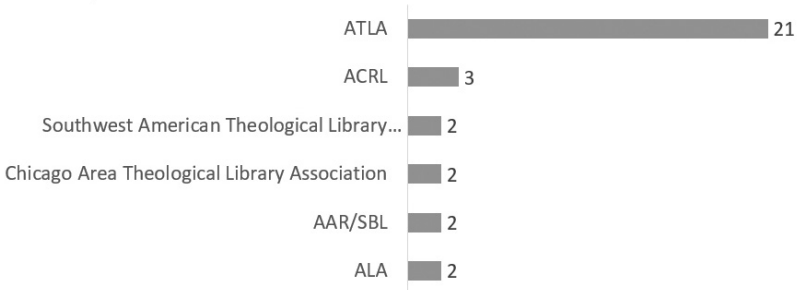
Q: Top Academic Journals?



Each of these are ranked differently, but you can see Christian Century was mentioned six times.

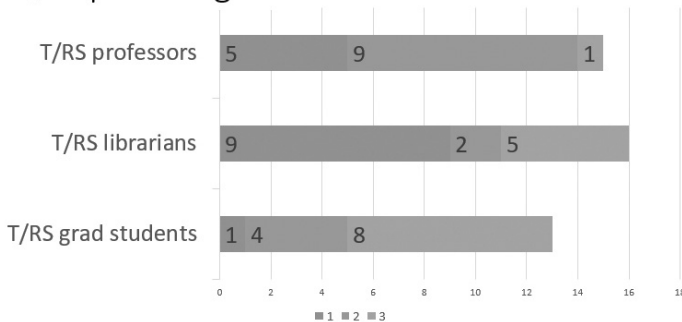
- b. 11 responses to question three listed conferences as one of their top three choices; the results may indicate again the preference for colleagues who also work in theological libraries:

Q: Top Academic Conferences?



- c. 15 responses listed colleagues as one of the top three choices:

Q: Top Colleagues?



## Building Connections with Graduate Students and (Aspiring) Faculty

By David Schmearsal

Having captured an overview of the task of keeping current from the perspective of theological librarians, we thought it would also be helpful to receive feedback from those we serve, particularly from graduate students who will soon be new faculty members. The following is based on the innovative, high-tech application of sitting down and talking with two of our graduate (PhD) students who are aspiring to become faculty members. I recognize this is not a scientific survey, but at least it offers an indication, and for the record, I treated the students to lunch. I asked them to answer four questions:

1. How can we/how do you monitor trends in your field (i.e., so that the library can make sure we have adequate sources for your next project?)
  - a. One student, Andrew, noted the following:
    - i. Conferences, especially wild-card sessions, which are often offered by people who are intending to form a new interest group
    - ii. Print journal tables of contents
    - iii. Blogs, especially professional societies' blogs that occasionally have a post about recent publications
    - iv. Twitter
  - b. Another student, Lisa, stated, "Since I am engaged in intersectional work, I am often looking at the intersection, at the two to three parts that go into it:
    - i. "For disability theology, I look for new publications in **publishers' catalogs** from particular presses (Baylor has a series on disability theology, for example), and branch out from there.
    - ii. "For disability studies, I have found a **Facebook group** for those teaching disability studies and often find the participants mentioning new books and articles, some more and some less relevant. **I especially look at others doing intersectional work.**

- iii. “For theology, it depends on who my interlocutor is at a given moment, for example, Julian of Norwich. I use **World-Cat** to make myself aware of who the main authors are. I do not spend as much time trying to be ‘up to date’ in theology; I put my faith in Bridwell to have up-to-date materials in key areas and on essential figures.”
- 2. In the best of all possible worlds (or, just imagining a library with a healthy acquisitions budget) what sort of materials (books, journals, databases) would you want/need to support your research?
  - a. Andrew listed the following:
    - i. Digital tools (e.g., GIS, Omeka) and opportunities to learn them
    - ii. Filling out series (i.e., if we have part of a series, trying to get the whole thing)
    - iii. Good spaces
  - b. Lisa observed that she needs
    - i. **Critical, up-to-date editions of primary sources** (e.g., New City editions of Augustine)
    - ii. A robust selection of theological works from major publishers (OUP, Yale, etc.), published since 1995
    - iii. **Complete, up-to-date runs of key journals**
- 3. Given the fact that we cannot buy everything (even Bridwell can’t do this), how might you/we prioritize?
  - a. Andrew divided his response by category:
    - i. Books
      - 1. Everything by top-tier publishers (e.g., Oxford, Cambridge)
      - 2. Select titles from other publishers (e.g., Baker, Zondervan, IVP)
    - ii. Journals
      - 1. Top, recognized, standard journals in the field
      - 2. Filling in series and having complete runs of key journals
  - b. Lisa observed:
    - i. Bridwell does fine with the theological end of intersectional work.

- ii. For her work in theology and disability, it would be most helpful
  - 1. To **acquire materials more broadly at the intersection** of religion and disability
  - 2. To identify and acquire the main resources that are becoming part of the common parlance
- 4. What do you wish we (in the library) knew about your research?
  - a. Andrew would like libraries to recognize
    - i. How handy it would be to have a KIC scanner in the special collections reading room
    - ii. How much his field is digital-dependent: that much of an historian's work is done by scanning primary sources en masse and then working with them at home
  - b. Lisa stated, "My research requires a lot of flexibility. As you can see when I am using the library, I am everywhere in the stacks, all over the place while some of my colleagues are in one place. Because of the cross-disciplinary nature of my work, I **rely on the library to have solid resources reflecting a variety of voices, including** background work and introductory texts in theory."

## Social Media By Kaeley McMahan

As both the surveys of theological librarians and interviews of aspiring faculty members indicate, social media can offer a promising avenue for discovering new publications and emerging trends in a given area of research. The following section offers suggestions for using social media as a collection development tool and provides examples of especially useful feeds, sites, blogs, etc.

### **Using free online and social media resources to...**

- gain disciplinary information on a new topic
- find resources to build collections in a new research area
- assist graduate students and faculty with teaching resources and publication information

### **Areas of need and interest...**

- New Jewish Studies minor
  - Potentially becoming a major
  - New endowed chair in Jewish Studies (19th-21st centuries)
- Developing focus in medieval studies
  - Both in Art History and School of Divinity
- New Study of Religions faculty member
  - Islam in Africa
- Multi-year Silk Road programming and course offerings across the College
- Continue to develop my own areas of interest
  - Biblical Studies
  - Second Temple & Late Antiquity periods

### **Staying current via...**

- Twitter & Facebook
  - New projects & publications
  - Crowdsourcing & bibliographies
  - Digital humanities & archival projects
  - Conferences
  - Podcasts, lectures & interviews
- Browzine
- A test case

These are ways to get you to current discussions in various disciplines; what people are writing and presenting on is usually the most up-to-date information on a topic.

### **Staying current via Twitter**

- Find a good “hub” tweeter
  - Share their own content
  - Retweet good content from other Twitter users
  - Interact with their followers
  - Annette Yoshiko Reed (@AnnetteYReed), New York University
- Start to expand your network
  - Which retweets do you find most useful?
  - Whose tweets do you keep coming across?
  - Ancient Jew Review (@ancientjew)
  - Sarah Bond (@SarahEBond), University of Iowa



The following tables include suggestions of scholars, or organizations, who are good “hub” tweeters, who share good information and participate in interesting conversations, as well as podcasts, blogs, and online publications that share information on recent publications, conferences, and ongoing discussions in biblical and religious studies. Additional resources can be found here: <https://bit.ly/2sOJib9>.

**TABLE 1** Examples of Scholars, Organizations, and Publishers with Twitter Feeds

NAME	TWITTER HANDLE	NAME	TWITTER HANDLE
Annette Yoshiko Reed	@AnnetteYReed	Matthew Chalmers	@Matt_J_Chalmers
Kate Cooper	@kateantiquity	Todd Hanneken	@thanneken
Mark Goodacre	@goodacre	Harvard NELC	@HarvardNELC
Gay Byron	@GayByron	MEMEAC at CUNY	@memeac_cuny
Tiggy McLaughlin	@Amalasuentha	Ancient Jew Review	@ancientjew
Sarah Bond	@SarahEBond	Public Medievalist	@PublicMedieval
Andrew Jacobs	@drewjakeprof	Early Islamic Books	@EarlyIslam
Sarah Eltantawi	@SEltantawi	Brill Religious Books	@Brill_Religious
Nyasha Junior	@NyashaJunior	Gorgias Press	@gorgiaspress
Sophie Hay	@pompei79	Empires of Faith	@EOFOxford
Lidwien Kapteijns	@lkapteij	Enoch Seminar	@Enoch_Seminar

**TABLE 2** Examples of Podcasts, Lectures, and Digital Humanities and Archival Projects

New Books Network Podcast: Religion & Faith	<a href="https://newbooksnetwork.com/category/religion-faith/">https://newbooksnetwork.com/category/religion-faith/</a>
Introducing the Qur’an Podcast	<a href="https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/series/introducing-quran">https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/series/introducing-quran</a>
New Testament Review Podcast	<a href="https://podtail.com/en/podcast/new-testament-review/">https://podtail.com/en/podcast/new-testament-review/</a>
NT Pod	<a href="http://podacre.blogspot.com/">http://podacre.blogspot.com/</a>
Letters of Paul Online Course	<a href="https://div.hds.harvard.edu/lettersofpaul/">https://div.hds.harvard.edu/lettersofpaul/</a>
Old Texts and New Methods Lecture	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGUcN3YLxII">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGUcN3YLxII</a>

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**TABLE 2** Examples of Podcasts, Lectures, and Digital Humanities and Archival Projects, *continued*

Pompeii 3D Reconstruction: There's No Place Like Home	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vHcMMYwSeKM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vHcMMYwSeKM</a>
Historic Synagogues of Europe Map	<a href="http://historicsynagogueseurope.org/synagogue-map">http://historicsynagogueseurope.org/synagogue-map</a>
British Library Digitised Manuscripts	<a href="https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/">https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/</a>
Vatican Library Digital Collection	<a href="https://www.vaticanlibrary.va/home.php?ling=eng">https://www.vaticanlibrary.va/home.php?ling=eng</a>
Paleo-Hebrew Dead Sea Scrolls	<a href="http://www.paleohebrewdss.com/">http://www.paleohebrewdss.com/</a>
Digital Syriac Corpus	<a href="https://syriacorporus.org/index.html">https://syriacorporus.org/index.html</a>
Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity Database	<a href="http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/">http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/</a>
Jubilees Palimpsest Project	<a href="http://jubilees.stmarytx.edu/">http://jubilees.stmarytx.edu/</a>
American Center of Oriental Research Photo Archive	<a href="https://acor.digitalrelab.com/">https://acor.digitalrelab.com/</a>

**TABLE 3** Examples of Blogs and Other Resource Aggregators

Biblical Studies Journal Alerts	<a href="http://biblicalstudiesjournals.blogspot.com/">http://biblicalstudiesjournals.blogspot.com/</a>
Ancient World Online	<a href="http://ancientworldonline.blogspot.com/">http://ancientworldonline.blogspot.com/</a>
Oxford University Press: Religion	<a href="https://blog.oup.com/category/arts_and_humanities/religion/">https://blog.oup.com/category/arts_and_humanities/religion/</a>
Larry Hurtado's Blog	<a href="https://larryhurtado.wordpress.com/">https://larryhurtado.wordpress.com/</a>
Reading Religion: A Publication of the AAR	<a href="http://readingreligion.org/">http://readingreligion.org/</a>
NT Blog	<a href="http://ntweblog.blogspot.com/">http://ntweblog.blogspot.com/</a>
Wabash Center Reflective Teaching Blog	<a href="https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/blog/">https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/blog/</a>
Bryn Mawr Classical Review	<a href="http://www.bmcreview.org/">http://www.bmcreview.org/</a>
Candida Moss at The Daily Beast	<a href="https://www.thedailybeast.com/author/candida-moss">https://www.thedailybeast.com/author/candida-moss</a>
Biblical Studies Online	<a href="https://biblicalstudiesonline.wordpress.com/">https://biblicalstudiesonline.wordpress.com/</a>