

# Updates and Invitation to the LEEP Theological Librarianship Course for Alumni, Library Leaders, and Potential Students

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**ABSTRACT** Since its beginning in 2005 as a joint project between Atla and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, a course on Theological Librarianship has enrolled more than 260 students and involved dozens of Atla members as volunteer guests. After a presentation of data about the course, members of the conversation group reported alumni achievements, met alumni from other cohorts, and discussed strategies for awareness and recruitment of students as new Atla members and leaders.

## THE HISTORY AND METHOD OF ATLA'S THEOLOGICAL LIBRARIANSHIP COURSE

Carisse Berryhill reviewed key dates in the development of the course by Atla and its Professional Development Committee, its agreement with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), and the online course environment.

- **1979:** A new Ad Hoc committee on Professional Development was formed.
- **2000:** A new Professional Development Committee was formed, chaired by Roberta Schaafsma.
- **2000 ATLA Annual Conference:** Executive Director Dennis Norlin announced that the upcoming Wabash Colloquy would explore possibility of “developing relationships with library schools,” or offering “our own course” from Chicago Headquarters’ electronic classroom.

- **2004:** Five-year agreement with UIUC announced at ATLA Annual Conference in Kansas City, Missouri.
- **2004:** Carisse Berryhill was recruited to teach in UIUC's online LEEP program (<https://ischool.illinois.edu/degrees-programs/graduate/ms-library-and-information-science/mslis-leep-online>) and was given the syllabus developed by the Professional Development Committee, to be developed at her discretion.
- **2005:** LIST 590 TL began in the Fall semester with 18 students, offered as a Special Topics course.
- **2014:** New Course number LIS 568 LE (its own number)
- **2018:** New Course Number: IS 568 AO (its own number)
- **2020:** New Course Number IS 582 TLS (Advanced Topics)

Atla's five-year agreement with UIUC stipulated that Atla would develop the syllabus, select an instructor, publicize the course to its membership, and encourage enrollment. UIUC would employ the instructor, set up the course, enroll students, and administer the course as part of its iSchool's offerings, including technological support.

**IS 582 TLO Course Description:** "Provides an overview of the contexts, materials services, and issues characterizing theological librarianship. Course activities include readings, online discussion, writing assignments, exams, and a weekly two-hour live session. Students interact with a number of librarians currently working in the field. Students enrolled for 4 hours complete an additional term project. Offered for 2 or 4 hours of credit."

**UIUC's LEEP Technological Environment:** The class meets online in a synchronous two-hour session each week. Students submit asynchronous assignments in UIUC's course management system. Initially the course used a web-based platform written by the library school using student live chat, real-time instructor lecture by dial-up telephone, and asynchronous assignments. The course moved to Moodle with livestream on Blackboard Elluminate. The course now uses Canvas with captioned livestream on Zoom.

## WHO ARE THE STUDENTS?

Carisse Berryhill presented data about the students, enrollment, and Atla member involvement.

- **Staff and librarians at Atla institutions.** Often these students have graduate degrees in the theological disciplines, and some have library degrees as well.
- **Degree-seeking students at Illinois.** Some of these students have undergraduate degrees in religious studies or have studied at a religiously-oriented college.
- **Degree-seeking students in the WISE consortium of graduate library schools** (<https://wiseeducation.org>). These students may also have backgrounds in religious studies or theology.
- **Non-degree-seeking students who are interested in professional growth or specialization.** Many of these students already have MLIS degrees or other advanced degrees. Some work at institutions that have absorbed theological programs or have added theological degrees.
- **Religious affiliations:** Some students are Christian, but students affiliated with other religious traditions and people with no religious affiliation also enroll.
- **Geography:** Students come from the United States and Canada. Time zone disparities have been incompatible with real-time live sessions that characterize LEEP at UIUC.

### **COURSE ENROLLMENT DATA**

- The course has been offered once every academic year since 2005 for 18 years.
- Total enrollment during that time has been 266 students for an average of 15 students a year.
- About five students per year enroll for four credit hours. The remainder choose two credit hours. (WISE students enroll in the number of credit hours assigned by their home institutions.)
- The highest enrollment was 25 in 2012, and the lowest was eight in both 2016 and 2023.
- The course has never failed to make.

### **ATLA MEMBER INVOLVEMENT**

Since 2005, 68 different guests, including Atla staff, Atla members and board, and accrediting officers have agreed to visit the class and an-

swer questions about their work and theological librarianship. The champion guest is William Badke, who has given a live interview for every course offering for 18 years. Guests have granted 172 live interviews, which is an average of nine per semester. (In a few cases, two people were guests together. These are counted as two interviews.)

### **IMPACT OF THE COURSE ON ATLA**

Gillian Harrison Cain presented an analysis of data based on Atla membership records.

Of the individuals who took the course between 2005 and 2023, 112 were not in our membership database. Of the 154 that were in our membership database:

- 91 (34% of the total) have been an individual or student member of Atla for at least one year.
  - 33 are current (FY23) individual members.
  - 18 were members for one to two years around the time they took the class.
- 27 have never been an individual or student member or affiliated with an institutional member.
- 87 have had an affiliation with an institutional member.
  - 58 have an active affiliation with a current (FY23) institutional member.
- 25 (10% of total) have served or are currently serving in a leadership position (board, committee, editorial board, etc.) in Atla.

### **ATLA SCHOLARSHIPS**

Carisse Berryhill reported that when the course began in 2005, Atla offered tuition equalization grants to student members of Atla who were in good standing before enrollment. In the first five years of the course, enrollment never fell below 15 students. When the Diversity Committee was first formed in 2008, it offered five scholarships to the course for student members from underrepresented populations. When the Diversity Committee was re-designed in 2015, it offered one or two larger scholarships to minority students, but the scholarship was not linked to the UIUC Theological Librarianship course. The current DEI scholarship is \$4000. A recipient may use it

to enroll in “a Theological Librarianship course,” or in a course of study at any ALA-accredited library program. The award includes an Atla Annual conference attendance grant and a poster session requirement, and a subsequent Atla blog post by the recipient. The most recent DEI scholarship recipient to use their award for the UIUC course was Marian Ekwegwu in 2020.

### **HOW ATLA MEMBERS CAN BE INVOLVED**

- Publicize the course at our Atla institutions, to our students and staff, and at meetings of regional associations.
- Encourage Atla staff to consider offering course grants for staff at Atla institutions and for student members.
- Encourage outreach about the course when Atla exhibits at conferences such as AAR/SBL and ALA.
- Volunteer to be a guest in area of expertise.

### **DISCUSSION**

Several former students attended in person or virtually, as well as other people interested in the course. Attendees introduced themselves and stated their institutional affiliations. Anthony Elia (Perkins Library Director, Southern Methodist University), an alum of the first class (2005), was present.

