
PANEL PRESENTATIONS

CRRA

The Past, the Present, and the Future

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ABSTRACT: This report discusses the integration of the Catholic Research Resources Alliance (CRRA) into Atla, focusing on the history of CRRA, its current state within Atla, and the future outlook for this collaboration. Opportunities and challenges are presented.

INTRODUCTION

This report discusses the integration of the Catholic Research Resources Alliance (CRRA) into Atla, focusing on the history of CRRA, its current state within Atla, and the future outlook for this collaboration. The report is based on a presentation by Mark Shelton (College of the Holy Cross), Brian Morin (Mount Angel Abbey Library), and Gillian Harrison Cain (Atla), all of whom have played significant roles in this process. The integration has brought together two organizations with aligned missions and goals, promising to enhance access to Catholic resources and further the academic work of scholars in theology and religious studies.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CRRA

The Catholic Research Resources Alliance (CRRA) was founded in 2008 by eight institutions, each with significant Catholic archives and special collections. These institutions recognized the need to create a centralized and enduring global access point to Catholic resources in America. The mission of CRRA was ambitious: to bring together resources from diverse institutions, ensuring that scholars, students, and the general public could access these invaluable materials.

From its inception, CRRA focused on collaborative development of systems and services to make Catholic resources widely accessible. One of the most significant achievements of CRRA has been the development of the Catholic Portal, a centralized platform that aggregates unique, specialized archival information. This portal, which includes contributions from many institutions, has become an essential tool for researchers interested in Catholic studies.

Another key initiative under CRRA was the creation of the Catholic News Archive, which sought to digitize and provide open access to Catholic newspapers and other diocesan publications. The initiative identified over 800 titles for potential inclusion in the archive and worked diligently to negotiate with copyright holders and secure grants for digitization. A significant part of this work involved creating detailed metadata at the article level to maximize accessibility.

THE PRESENT: CRRA WITHIN ATLA

The integration of CRRA into Atla represents a strategic alliance designed to leverage the strengths of both organizations. The integration process was marked by extensive discussions between CRRA and Atla leaders, facilitated by shared goals and a history of collaboration. Gillian Harrison Cain highlighted the benefits of this integration, noting that Atla's established technical infrastructure and administrative support systems have allowed CRRA members to focus more on their core mission—engaging with the community and expanding the use of Catholic resources. This effort has also created opportunities to expand the scope of the existing CRRA initiatives, such as the Catholic News Archive, and to explore similar projects within other denominations.

The integration has also provided a platform for CRRA to connect more effectively with a broader academic community. Brian Morin pointed out that one of the current tasks is to harmonize the resources and technological capabilities of Atla with the specialized needs of CRRA. For instance, the transition of CRRA's LibGuides to Atla's platform is an example of how the integration is facilitating resource consolidation while maintaining the distinct identity and mission of CRRA.

The effort has been met with overwhelmingly positive responses from the member institutions. Approximately 85% of the original 45 CRRA member institutions are now also members of Atla, demonstrating the perceived value of the integration. The remaining institutions are still in discussion about their future involvement, but the overall trend is one of growing collaboration and shared resources.

A CRRA Program Committee, made up of CRRA and Atla representatives, has been charged with building a strong community of support within Atla. The committee will also evaluate the scope and use of CRRA programs and services. This will allow the committee to also advise Atla on the development of new services and resources in support of the Catholic research community.

FUTURE OUTLOOK

Looking ahead, the future of CRRA within Atla is full of potential. The integration is expected to yield significant benefits not just for CRRA and Atla but also for the broader academic and religious communities. The collaboration opens up possibilities for new initiatives, such as the potential development of denominational archives for other religious groups, modeled after the success of the Catholic News Archive.

Mark Shelton emphasized that the ongoing work involves not just maintaining but expanding the scope of CRRA's projects. This includes continuing the digitization and metadata work for the Catholic News Archive and exploring ways to engage more deeply with the academic community through conferences, workshops, and collaborative research projects. The commitment to keeping CRRA's resources open and free is another critical aspect of the

future strategy. Atla's support ensures that these resources remain accessible to a global audience, thus fulfilling CRRA's original mission of creating enduring global access to Catholic resources. Work has already begun with transitioning web resources and platforms, as well as re-imagining subcommittees.

Additionally, the integration has strengthened the community of scholars and librarians focused on Catholic studies. By bringing together CRRA's specialized focus and Atla's broader theological mission, the merged organization is better positioned to support professional development, foster collaboration, and advance theological research.

CONCLUSION

The integration of the Catholic Research Resources Alliance (CRRA) into Atla represents a significant step forward in the effort to provide comprehensive access to Catholic resources. The history of CRRA, its current integration with Atla, and the future prospects for this collaboration demonstrate the potential for academic and religious institutions to work together in innovative ways. This effort not only preserves the unique contributions of CRRA, but also enhances its capacity to serve a broader community, ensuring that these vital resources remain accessible for generations to come.

As this integration continues to evolve, it will be essential to monitor the outcomes and ensure that both organizations continue to meet the needs of their members and the wider community. The success of this integration will depend on the continued collaboration and commitment of all involved, and it serves as a model for how similar organizations might come together to achieve common goals.