

## ***Incorporating Concepts of Hospitality into Theological Library Assessment***

### **Abstract**

Following the completion of a year-long library space utilization study, the Princeton Theological Seminary Library sought new ways of shaping questions about library space and library assessment overall. The concept of “hospitality,” as it has been so interestingly articulated in the literature of theological librarianship, provided the library with a challenging conceptual foothold in shaping new assessment questions. This essay reflects on the “hospitality” concept in relation to three assessment areas of interest to theological libraries: information literacy, scholarly impact, and the library as workplace.

*“I feel more strongly with every recurring year that our country has no tradition which does it so much honour and which it should guard so jealously as that of its hospitality. It is a tradition that is unique as far as my experience goes (and I have visited not a few places abroad) among the modern nations. Some would say, perhaps, that with us it is rather a failing than anything to be boasted of. But granted even that, it is, to my mind, a princely failing, and one that I trust will long be cultivated among us.” -- James Joyce, *The Dead**

### **Introduction**

For many years, a framed photograph hung on the wall of the Ph.D. Suite of the Henry Luce III Library at Princeton Theological Seminary to celebrate the opening of the space in 1994: a black-and-white-1960s-era photo of the more spartan doctoral student space in the Robert E. Speer Library and the humorous (mis)quote, “I am YHWH your God who brought you out of the land of bondage in the old Ph.D. room and brought you into the land of the Luce Ph.D. Suite flowing with milk and honey.” This sentiment of “thankful deliverance, into a new “promised land,” dramatic as it may sound, has been a common response to the new library at Princeton since its opening in May 2013. The new building is a thing of beauty, and a wonderful complex for our faculty, students, and visiting researchers.

During the building’s first year of operation, the Library undertook a year-long Space Utilization Study to assess patron use and perceptions of public spaces in the new building. The library employed a variety of methodologies to collect quantitative and qualitative data. At the end of the academic year, the library analyzed the data to identify how the results might be used to improve decisions, policies, and plans concerning library space. We gathered a great deal of useful information that has already been helpful in pointing to concrete steps for improvement. Going forward, the library needed to regularize space feedback into other ongoing forms of assessment. We turned to the good models on offer in assessment conferences, workshops, and the professional literature. Library professional literature, particularly in the last three years, has produced a wide range of new works about innovative academic library space assessment practices and methodologies that will inform future work. Many of these methodologies do, of course, examine the importance of welcome, accessibility, openness, and flexibility.<sup>1</sup>

It was in the literature of theological librarianship that the theme of hospitality, as it has been so interestingly articulated in recent publications and presentations, that we found a new conceptual foothold in identifying useful gaps in the

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<sup>1</sup> See (amongst many others) Eric D.M. Johnson and Michelle M. Kazmer, “Library Hospitality: Some Preliminary Considerations,” *Library Quarterly* 81, 4 (October 2011): 383-404; Susan E. Montgomery, “Library Space Assessment: User Learning Behaviors in the Library,” *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 40, 1 (January 2014): 70-75; and Danuta A. Nitecki, “Space Assessment as a Venue for Defining the Academic Library,” *Library Quarterly* 81, 1 (January 2011): 27-59.

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Jenifer Gundry is Librarian for Applications and Assessment at the Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Princeton, New Jersey.

questions we needed to consider. However, it also became clear that the hospitality concept could help us think afresh about library assessment beyond merely space issues. Most importantly, we came to appreciate that theological libraries can enrich their assessment endeavors by being attentive to new reflections on hospitality.

## Hospitality as a Conceptual Foothold in Library Assessment

Assessment is framed by both extended and local contexts. The former include accrediting standards, norms and innovations with professional librarianship, shifting trends and patterns in research and publishing practices across discipline specifically and academy broadly, peer benchmarking, and others. In this context, many theological libraries in North America share interest in documents like the Association of Theological Schools' *General Institutional Standards*<sup>2</sup> and the Association of College & Research Libraries' *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (currently in third draft form, with final form expected in early 2015).<sup>3</sup> Local contexts, by contrast, are often delineated in institutional and library strategic plans, many of which — in theological institutions — include explicit mission-related aims for service to the Church.

Approaching assessment work using themes or concepts can help libraries break away from a perfunctory “ticking the box” approach to satisfying particular standards, goals, and objectives, and refocus instead on the library’s values. One of the most practical ways that theological libraries can engage with the evolving concept of hospitality is to allow it to raise new questions, or raise familiar questions from fresh perspectives, about library performance and contribution to learning outcomes and scholarly productivity. The hospitality concept has significant roots in the Bible, embraces a service orientation, and is an ongoing invitation to creativity and openness. The hospitality concept is therefore an ideal springboard for libraries to reflect on how they answer the big questions that drive our daily work, our services, our policies, our contributions to the community as a whole. Recent reflections offer practical ideas for policies, services, and resources that enable hospitality, from the accessibility of curated collections and resources to customer service initiatives<sup>4</sup> to comfortable, protected, well-equipped spaces and senses.<sup>5</sup>

While there are many more, I will reflect briefly here on three areas — information literacy, scholarly impact, and the library as workplace — where “hospitality” can inform particularly rich questions for library assessment. In doing so, I will highlight some questions that have been prompted by our recent work in bringing concerns regarding hospitality into our assessment work at Princeton Theological Seminary Library.

## Assessing Information Literacy: Scholarship as Conversation

A foundational shift in ACRL’s updated approach to information literacy in the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* is the move away from prescriptive standards towards the evolution of six essential principles that it describes as “threshold concepts.” Academic libraries of all varieties anticipate a process of remapping their information literacy assessment endeavors in light of this new *Framework*, once that document is finalized.

Perhaps the most immediately accessible ACRL threshold concept is that “Scholarship is a Conversation.” The *Framework* describes this as “the idea of sustained discourse within a community of scholars, researchers, or professionals, with new insights and discoveries occurring over time as a result of competing perspectives and interpretations.”<sup>6</sup> ATIS accredited

<sup>2</sup> The Association of Theological Schools, *General Institutional Standards*. <http://www.ats.edu/uploads/accrediting/documents/general-institutional-standards.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Association of College & Research Libraries, “Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education,” Third Draft (November 12, 2014), 11. <http://acrl.ala.org/ilstandards/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Framework-for-IL-for-HE-draft-3.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Natalie Williams, “Cultivating a Culture of Customer Service in Theological Libraries Part 2: Sacred Hospitality: Customer Service Initiatives at Pitts Theology Library,” *ATLA 2008 Proceedings*, Preconference Workshops, 12-14.

<sup>5</sup> See Carisse Mickey Berryhill, “The Guest Brings the Blessing: Hospitality in Theological Librarianship,” *Summary of Proceedings: Sixty-Seventh Annual Conference of the American Theological Library Association*. Charlotte, NC (2013): 84-89; and Anthony Elia, “The Hospitalities of Community, Space, and Sound,” *Summary of Proceedings: Sixty-Seventh Annual Conference of the American Theological Library Association*. Charlotte, NC (2013): 294-299.

<sup>6</sup> ACRL, “Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education,” 11.

institutions see a similar formulation reflected in Section 4 of the *General Institutional Standards*: “The library should provide physical and online environments conducive to learning and scholarly interaction” (4.2.4), reinforcing the role of theological libraries as spaces that both host and foster conversation. The hospitality concept is particularly useful to libraries reflecting and shaping assessment questions around this construct.

### ***How effectively does the library provide physical and intellectual spaces for scholarly conversation, including the voices of the guest, stranger, or temporary patron?***

Hospitality literature is rich with examples of how learning and formation are rooted in the exchange between the known and the unknown. John Weaver suggests that in the very act of receiving the stranger, libraries are entering into occasions of revelation and instruction<sup>7</sup> through dialogue. Libraries can serve as physical and intellectual spaces both to create narratives and to encounter the narratives of others — a vitally important factor in the seminary experience. Carisse Mickey Berryhill states, “The duty of the guest is to tell the guest’s story. This is what we seek for our students: for them to form the narratives of their lives and be formed by the narratives they engage with at college or seminary.”<sup>8</sup> Libraries do well to examine how they provide opportunities for such exchanges and narrative formations — spaces, programs, technologies, events, and exhibits all have the potential to model and engage scholarship as a conversation for our patrons. Anthony Elia describes this beautifully as a “hospitality of ‘intellectual commerce’...what happens in a theological library is a form of exchange, a bartering of ideas, a form of theological commerce.”<sup>9</sup>

### ***Does the library effectively draw patrons into scholarly conversations with texts they might not otherwise engage, or provide resources, publications, or publishing platforms that allow patrons to create new texts or new forms of textual engagement?***

David Stewart noted some early church and monastic-era libraries operated as physical places, protected spaces, and locales of textual exchange, and asks: “What about hospitality as fostering an encounter or a conversation between a guest and a text? Is there any parallel between what libraries did then (through a scriptorium) and what we can do now (through libraries serving as publishers)?”<sup>10</sup> What impact might a library be able to have in a publishing role, as scholarly conversation takes shape for the future?

## **Assessing Library Impact on Scholarship and the Church Broadly**

Libraries have developed an array of strategies for making correlations between the library and learning outcomes and productivity within our institutions. It can prove more complicated to demonstrate library impact on scholarship and the Church broadly — though many of our institutions feature these ambitions in mission statements, strategic plans, or other guiding documents and programs. Librarians can measure the reach of some of their services to outside researchers: guests who register for a card or to use archives, interlibrary loans, memberships in Friends’ groups, public participation in library events, etc. Measuring impact on guest patrons who we may not be aware are among us is more challenging. Once again, the hospitality concept can help us ask better questions about guest patrons and library impact beyond the walls of our institutions.

How effectively does the library provide a platform for receiving and engaging with “strange new ideas,” the voices of strangers, outsiders, the “others”? How can patrons who are only passing through record their comments about library impact? How is the stranger invited, or given a responsibility, to contribute to the work of the library?

Carisse Mickey Berryhill reminds us that strangers are valuable sources of potential insight. “In the New Testament, the teacher is the guest and the learner is the host. Most of the insight comes from the person who doesn’t reside

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<sup>7</sup> John Weaver, “The Library and Biblical Hospitality,” Friends of the ACU Library, accessed October 17, 2014, <http://blogs.acu.edu/facul/2012/10/15/the-library-and-biblical-hospitality-dr-john-b-weaver/>.

<sup>8</sup> Berryhill, 88.

<sup>9</sup> Elia, 296.

<sup>10</sup> David Stewart, “Theological Libraries and the ‘Theology of Hospitality,’” *Summary of Proceedings: Sixty-Seventh Annual Conference of the American Theological Library Association*. Charlotte, NC (2013): 287.

there. We must welcome the voices of strangers...Hospitality is a kind of covenant mutuality: we have things to learn from our travelers. These guests bless us.”<sup>11</sup> Further, she suggests that in the traditional hospitality model, guests have responsibilities not merely to receive hospitality in a passive manner, but to contribute a narrative, a story, and authentic wisdom to the host. This has potentially rich implications for libraries, and opens the doors to thinking creatively about how we engage patrons from outside of our communities.

While researching a completely different topic, I came across an old letter that calls to mind Dr. Berryhill’s description of the responsibilities of the library guest in the hospitality model. A letter printed in the journal *Science* in 1920 features a plea from one scientist to his fellow researchers to consider it a professional responsibility to contribute to the collection of scientific material in libraries in exchange for the hospitality they have received: “If an investigator accepts the hospitality and uses the facilities of the Library of Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole, or that of Stanford University, and one is made quite at home in both without introduction, it seems no more than fair that these libraries be supplied in return with as complete a set as possible of his own publications if they lie within the field of interest of the library.”<sup>12</sup>

This early twentieth-century exhortation to researchers to contribute to the work of the libraries hints at some interesting visions for a theological library — patron collaboration in the twenty-first century. For example, outside of formal research fellowship arrangements, there may be a wide variety of ways for visiting researchers to contribute or leave behind work to enrich the libraries they use, from the contribution of a volume of their work or a unique work published in their region, to an oral history recording of their research findings for the library’s archives. In addition to donations, what role does the stranger, guest, outside researcher have in collection development, programming, library space arrangement, web site design, digital library or repository development, transcription, and other crowdsourcing work? Beth M. Sheppard and Shaneé Yvette Murrain have explored the role of religious programming as a form of hospitality that quite literally invites the stranger voice into the library space in the form of open mic nights and other events that allow libraries to “both increase their value and serve the wider missions of their schools.”<sup>13</sup>

### ***How might our perspectives on “patron-centered design” and “patron experience” assessment change if we considered the stranger? How can the stranger’s experience be assessed?***

Applying the lens of the stranger, guest, or visiting researcher to library questions is a directly applicable use of the hospitality concept in assessment work. As Anthony Elia notes, “We must ask ‘what is it that the patron thinks, imagines, or expects in a library — to find, see experience, engage with?...The hospitality of expectation then, is not simply to give patrons what they want and expect, but to go beyond this.’”<sup>14</sup> The stranger/guest lens is also useful as libraries attempt to balance what at first might appear to be contradictions: the communal and the quiet, policy and freedom, primary mission and external demand. David Stewart describes this tension in the libraries where he serves: “How is my sense of what is the primary focus of the library in my institution reflected/conveyed in the space and ambience? As one specific example, one of Bethel’s two libraries in St. Paul is centered around an Information Commons model, where we do tend to prize high-traffic and ‘synergy’ over serenity. How does that contribute to — or detract from — a spirit of hospitality?”<sup>15</sup> As libraries assess patron-centered design and experience, the hospitality concept also encourages libraries to go beyond their traditional patron base to consciously invite new perspectives in. How can listservs, conferences, and other forums be useful to libraries in gathering feedback and design ideas?

<sup>11</sup> Berryhill, 88.

<sup>12</sup> Neil E. Stevens, “The Obligation of the Investigator to the Library,” *Science* 52, 1340 (September 3, 1920): 224.

<sup>13</sup> Beth M. Sheppard and Shaneé Yvette Murrain, “The Final Frontier: Events and Hospitality in the Theological Library Context,” *Summary of Proceedings: Sixty-Eighth Annual Conference of the American Theological Library Association*. New Orleans, LA (2014), forthcoming. Quotation from authors’ copy, page 1.

<sup>14</sup> Elia, 295.

<sup>15</sup> Stewart, 287.

## Assessing the Library as Workplace

Library assessment activities have repeatedly been tethered to two unavoidable realities. The first is that the sweeping changes facing the profession, academy, and the Church in the next two decades will require that libraries learn to adapt quickly and build iterative improvement into not just their products, processes, and services but also their employee skill sets. The second reality is that library staffs are the primary medium through which libraries will achieve their mission-related ambitions. Hence libraries-as-workplaces need to attend more purposefully to staff development as part of mission related work. As Anthony Elia reminds us, human resources can often be overlooked, but “only human resources in the form of ‘human knowledge, wisdom, sympathy and empathy’ can provide hospitality.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, one outcome many libraries are trying to achieve is that of the library as a flexible, innovative, and supportive professional, intellectual, social (and, depending on the library, spiritual) workplace for its employees. ATS accredited institutions see this reflected in Section 4 of the General Institution Standards: “Schools shall provide structured opportunities to theological librarians for professional development and, as appropriate, contribute to the development of theological librarianship” (4.4.4). There exist a growing number of methodologies and tools for assessing libraries as workplaces, including the Association of Research Libraries’ ClimateQUAL<sup>®17</sup> and others. The hospitality concept suggests some additional interesting questions about the library as workplace.

### ***Does the library provide adequate professional support for librarians to excel in the role of guest in teaching and research spaces, in vulnerable or confused intellectual spaces?***

Hospitality literature reminds us of the “stranger” element inherent in even those relationships that are physically close: our students, our faculty, our library staff members. Carisse Mickey Berryhill asks, “How is the librarian also a guest? We are invited to classrooms and department meetings if we have met the test... People invite our websites and LibGuides and catalogs and tutorials into their learning management systems, into their laptops, if we have met the tests of quality, usability, and accessibility.”<sup>18</sup> The concept is helpful to libraries that may for too long rely on assumptions about their students, our faculty, and ourselves. These familiar beings are, ultimately, often foreign to us, and we should come to recognize and embrace that strangeness, that uniqueness, and strive to shape workplaces that allow for these explorations.

### ***How creatively does the library support individual staff experimentation and the development of expertise? Does the library foster cross-departmental flexibility or opportunities to work beyond traditional responsibility areas of responsibility?***

As hosts, librarians may view the extension of hospitality as central to the institution’s mission or to their own identity, as Tracy Powell Iwaskow notes. Hospitality may create free form, unexpected spaces where librarians can “bring [their] own gifts to the interactions”<sup>19</sup> and engage in the personal spiritual practice of “extending ourselves.”<sup>20</sup> Libraries that foster individual librarians’ growth, expertise, and outreach ultimately help librarians bring unique value to the roles of both host and guest. Libraries may also want to examine their organizations for opportunities to experiment occasionally with alternative models of responsibility assignment, perhaps on a project basis. At many theological libraries, staff “guests” include a range of roles, including volunteers, interns, and student workers. How satisfying is the work for these guest contributors? How can these rich sets of human resources be brought most directly in line with mission-centric work?

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<sup>16</sup> Elia, 296.

<sup>17</sup> “ClimateQUAL<sup>®</sup> Organizational Climate and Diversity Assessment,” Association of Research Libraries, accessed December 1, 2014, <http://www.climatequal.org/home>.

<sup>18</sup> Berryhill, 88-89.

<sup>19</sup> Tracy Powell Iwaskow, “Hospitality and Our Broader Communities,” *Summary of Proceedings: Sixty-Seventh Annual Conference of the American Theological Library Association*. Charlotte, NC (2013): 293.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

***How does the library create a safe, sane, and balanced workplace to protect its employees?***

A common refrain in the hospitality literature is that of an appeal to the importance of stewardship in relation to hospitality offerings. “It should be remembered that the implications of the servant model need to be balanced with those of the steward model.”<sup>21</sup> This balance is critical for libraries that are increasingly asked to do more with less, often without any clear understanding about what these expectations mean for library staff. Libraries that have a strong pro-library voice at the administrative and governing body levels go far in creating the balanced workplaces that are necessary for employees to produce and flourish. Hospitable workplaces welcome and protect staff with reasonable policies that are consistently enforced, appropriately inclusive and transparent decision-making mechanisms, and a commitment to clear multi-directional communication.

**Long Cultivated Among Us**

The hospitality concept is a welcome thread in the current literature of theological librarianship, one that has been particularly useful in identifying new questions for library assessment, and one that we will likely return to time and again. As David Stewart reminds us, “Thus the value and the practice of hospitality in our libraries is worth reexamining, reconsidering, and rediscovering in each generation.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Herman A. Peterson, “Theological Librarianship as Ministry,” *Summary of Proceedings: Fifty-fifth Annual Conference of the American Theological Library Association*. Durham, NC (2001): 236.

<sup>22</sup> Stewart, 288.