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In 1994 the Council on the Graduate Study of Religion (hereafter CGSR) commissioned a survey of the hiring practices of departments and schools of religion. The hope was to understand better how it is done, from the solicitation of applications through the appointment of a new colleague.

To this end, the CGSR developed a questionnaire and mailed it on an annual basis to every department and school that advertised a position in *Openings* (now known as [Employment Listings](#)). [The responses have been collated](#) and presented to CGSR for review and discussion.

What follows provides an update to that initial summary, utilizing data from the 1996, 2004, and 2010 surveys. Before presenting the data and some commentary on it, we offer several notes on the powers and limits of the survey instrument.

The Survey

The survey was sent for completion to all institutions that listed an academic position in *Employment Listings* in a twelve-month period. From 1994–1995 through 2006–2007, this period was the fiscal year (July 1 to June 30). Due to a new AAR posting system, the twelve-month span changed: for 2007–2008, it covered July 1–April 30; and for 2008–2009 forward, it has covered May 1–April 30.

The survey was not sent to other venues that could, and sometimes do, advertise positions in the study of religion; e.g., the Chronicle of Higher Education, the *Journal of the Association of Asian Studies*, etc. We are aware as well that occasionally jobs are advertised locally; e.g. in newspapers. While the survey is not therefore truly comprehensive in scope, we do believe that it is representative.

The survey data reflects what potential employers report to us. The questionnaire makes every

effort to ensure the comparability of data, but the answers reflect local practices. This is most clearly demonstrated in the terms these institutions use to denominate a position's, or a hiree's, area(s) of expertise in the study of religion.

Response rates vary significantly, and have in recent years decreased despite significant efforts to make the survey readily accessible electronically, and despite extensive follow-up efforts. The authors are particularly concerned about this trend, in which increased ease of completion has been accompanied by decreased participation.

Beginning in 2009, when we started sending the survey only by e-mail, we began tracking failed contacts and removing them from the response rate. These are e-mails that bounced back, due to an outdated or incorrect e-mail address on file. Similarly, last year, before sending out the survey, we removed all of the listings which were clearly handled by search firms. These are typically easily identified by e-mail addresses ending in extensions other than .edu (.com or .org), and in previous years we had noticed that, as a rule, they do not respond, likely for proprietary reasons. By removing them in advance, this gave us a more fair sense of the response rate.

What follows provides tabular comparisons of responses to the survey questions for 1996, 2004, and 2010. In minor but noteworthy respects, the data is not entirely commensurate for these three years. Refinements in the questionnaire provided slightly more data in 2004, and questions that attempted to capture the effect on hiring of the 2008 financial crisis are included in the 2010 survey results.

For each year, the number given as the number of responses should be treated as the number of jobs represented in the survey, not the number of institutions. Many institutions respond with information for more than one job, effectively filling out more than one survey. In each case, the overall response rate as a percentage is approximate; the number of responses, representing individual jobs, is exact.

The Data

Responding institutions show notable continuity in the categories of liberal arts college, private university, and state university. Through 2006, theological seminaries are symmetrical, but there is a significant decrease in 2010 (which is itself a slight increase over a more dramatic drop in 2009).

There is no question that “stand-alone” theological seminaries were particularly vulnerable to the financial crisis, and future surveys should follow this particular line to determine whether a traditional source of hiring will in fact diminish in future years.

We note that the proportion of advertisements for tenure-track and term appointments shifted: from 1996, when the ratio was nearly 8:2, and 2006 when it was roughly 8:1, to 2010 when it was roughly 2:1. The more significant contributor to the change in ratio is the reduction in tenure-track jobs. At the same time, the total number of listed openings did not significantly decrease; i.e. the listing of term positions approximates the reduction in tenure-track listings.

An interesting coda to this fact is the relatively robust number of appointments that represented a newly created position (37 in 2010, as opposed to 27 in 2006). This suggests a dynamism in the market. One of the most striking findings in the survey is that the very large majority of openings receive less than 100 applications. Indeed the most common number of applications received is between 1 and 50, with significantly decreasing numbers received between 50 and 75 and, in turn, 75 and 100. This is a very different scenario from other fields in the humanities and social sciences. It seems clear that applicants for jobs in religious studies are competing with smaller cohorts than their counterparts in such fields as literature and history.

Less than 50 percent of the employers interviewed at the AAR Annual Meeting. Among those who did interview at AAR, meetings were conducted with approximately 10 applicants. Data on gender describes a fairly constant applicant pool comprised of 2/3 males and 1/3 female with some movement toward a more equitable proportion in hiring in 2010 (from 62 percent male/38 percent female in 2006 to 55 percent male/45 percent female in 2010).

Hirees remain overwhelming Caucasian. Underrepresented minorities never comprise more than 20 percent of hirees and typically comprise around 10–15 percent.

Two other striking constants emerge across the years of the survey. The proportion of hirees who hold a PhD compared to those who are ABD is consistently 3.5:1 to 4:1. And the proportion of hirees for whom the appointment is the first full-time appointment is almost always between 55 percent and 60 percent. While having the degree in hand is clearly preferable, it remains the case that ABD applicants do garner approximately one-quarter of these appointments. At the same time, all the applicants face a market in which there is significant lateral movement by

those who already hold jobs.

Finally, we note that the proportion of tenure-track to term positions shifted somewhat in 2010 (from about 7:2 to about 4:2.5). Information specifically sought to get some sense of the impact of the 2008 economic crisis is both interesting and necessarily tentative. If these respondents are representative; in 2010, 42 percent of searches were cancelled before a candidate was found, and over half of those were discontinued for financial reasons; 71 percent of those who closed a search anticipate opening it within 2–3 years, while 29 percent say prospects are uncertain.

The survey always asks employers to identify the focus of the search; in 2006 and 2010, the survey was able to chart searches in terms of key words in the job listings. We provide the raw data above and offer some observations toward clustering it in what follows:

- “Christian” and “Theology” traded first and second positions as the most robust keywords in 2006 and 2010.
- “Ethics,” “Islam,” “Asian,” and “Jewish/Judaism” comprise the second tier of keywords. “Ethics” and “Judaism” are at the same level in both 2006 and 2010. “Islam” and “Asian” grew significantly from 2006 to 2010.
- Bible positions dropped dramatically between 2006 and 2010. What this means is unclear, since the field has historically been robustly represented in the survey, and the AAR curricular survey demonstrated the decisive place of the Bible in undergraduate curricula.

It is crucial to underscore the ways in which nomenclature does not necessarily “translate” across the academy. For example: does “Asian” mean “Buddhism” and “Hinduism”? What is “Comparative” and how does it differ from “World/global”? Are “American” positions comparative or do they privilege a particular tradition? Our experiences in discussing data with the CGSR membership and in other venues has taught us that these are exceptionally complex matters, and that reasonable and thoughtful opinion can and will disagree about their meaning. That said, we would offer an observation and a closing caveat. The observation is that there is not in these keywords a particularly close correlation with the categories listed by the AAR, or organizing the program for the annual and regional meetings. This is not meant as any sort of a partisan statement; it is simply interesting and worth pondering. (These categories do not necessarily map particularly clearly onto the curricula of doctoral programs, either.) The caveat is simply that the keyword analysis cannot capture — indeed, may work against — achieving clarity about the idiosyncrasies of jobs that combine fields in nonintuitive ways. That, however, is simply further testimony to underscore the wonderful complexity that is the study of religion.

These surveys have been conducted for CGSR out of the University of Chicago Divinity School. Chicago's CGSR representative, Richard Rosengarten, has overseen them with the very able assistance of, first, Mr. Spencer Dew (now Professor Spencer Dew, of the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point!), and more recently Mr. Seth Perry. For the 2010 survey, the follow-up telephone contacts were ably conducted by Ms. Katherine Mitchell Rosengarten.