

Statement on Significant Scholarly Work
Department of Religion, St. Olaf College
2019

Introduction

Recognizing that excellent teaching is nourished by excellent scholarship, the Department of Religion expects active and committed participation in significant scholarly and other professional activity by its members. The Department takes an expansive view of what constitutes such work, acknowledges that the study of religion draws upon a wide variety of methodologies and approaches, and regards this diversity as a reflection of strength and vitality. Insofar as the study of religion (including the study of theology) is central to the college's mission and is included in general education, the Department recognizes that generalist scholarship and interdisciplinary inquiry may directly enhance its members' contributions to the college as much as more specialized individual research. Further, insofar as religion is of interest to many communities, including religious communities, the Department supports the accomplishment and dissemination of scholarship among wider publics in innovative ways.

Insofar as expectations in different fields of the study of religion can vary, significantly, the Department does not set rigid quantitative standards that would obviate the need for collegial evaluation and judgment. All members of the department should articulate a plan that guides their on-going scholarly engagement and make steady progress in their projects, even as they remain open to new opportunities or emerging interests. While not all work results in publication or even public presentation, some work must be available for public evaluation by peers.

Types of Scholarly Activity

Scholars of religion engage in various modes of research, depending on their sub-fields. These may include, but are not limited to: working with archival, archaeological, or textual materials; conducting comparative, constructive, cultural, ethical, ethnographic, historical, or pedagogical investigations; producing creative works, translations, or even textbooks used in other scholars' classrooms. At a general level, one might delineate between the following types of scholarly and professional activities, listed in descending order of significance:

- Original research.
- Synthetic, integrative, or interpretive work that is part of a scholarly conversation about others' original research.
- Publicly engaged scholarly activity that makes religious ideas and/or phenomena available to the wider community, including civic/community engagement, societies, broadcast media, and digital projects. While the outcome of this type of scholarly activity differs from traditional emphasis on the monograph or journal article, the work nevertheless has rigorous standards and can also be peer-reviewed.
- Professional leadership in national and international professional scholarly organizations, membership on dissertation committees, leadership of scholarly seminars or conferences. In most cases, such contributions are recognized and evaluated as part of Category 3: Contributions of Service and Leadership Within and Beyond the Institution. In some cases, however, leadership provided draws directly and significantly upon an individual's scholarly expertise.
- Systematic reflection on student learning that is documented by methodologies appropriate to the discipline of Religious Studies and/or Theology, located in the literature of the discipline and of student learning, and publicly disseminated.
- Mentored undergraduate research contributing to faculty publication, paper or presentation in any of the above categories.

The Department does not require all members to participate in all these activities, and recognizes that the proportion of activity across types of scholarship may vary over the course of a career.

Determination of Significance

Determining the significance of scholarly work in the study of religion involves recognition of the distinctive nature of sub-fields and of individuals' differing scholarly programs. Generally, however, in its evaluation of all the types of scholarly and professional activity identified above, the Department privileges peer-reviewed scholarly books and articles over other work. It values completed work over work in progress, scholarly works over works of popularization, individual or co-authorship over collaborative publications, presentations to scholarly audiences over those to general audiences, and activity in international and national venues over that in regional and local venues (except in highly specialized or emerging fields in which regional and local conferences and organizations are most active and professionally recognized).

The Department recognizes the importance of the validation of scholars' contributions that honors, awards, and grants can provide, though because funding in the field of Religion is limited, winning grants is not expected. It values honors, awards, and grants from external organizations over those awarded by the College; those that are peer-reviewed over those that are not; and those received from international or national organizations, (e.g., the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies) over those from regional or local organizations.

A candidate may present a range of work for review; the significance of contributions may vary as well. For example, a review essay published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, *Modern Theology*, the *Journal of Biblical Literature* or other flagship journals, may be valued more highly than an article in the published proceedings of a conference. Therefore, while the following examples are ranked in roughly descending order, their evaluation is subject to considered opinion expressed in letters written for the candidate's dossier.

- Scholarly books of greatest significance include: monographs, translations, or editorship of essay collections or critical editions. Examples of lesser significance: textbooks or books popularizing their subject matter. Both university presses and some associated with religious organizations or groups (for example, Eerdmans, Fortress Press and Westminster John Knox) publish reputable scholarship in several fields.
- Scholarly articles of greatest significance include those in peer-reviewed journals or peer-reviewed edited volumes. Of lesser significance: articles in published proceedings, contributions to edited volumes, review essays, scholarly book reviews, articles on topics in popular journals.
- Papers and presentations of greatest significance: invited presentations to scholarly audiences, papers delivered at national or international professional conferences or conventions, papers delivered at regional or local professional meetings. Of lesser significance: panel participation as moderator or discussant at conferences or conventions.
- Professional leadership: Examples of greatest significance: editorship of a journal, peer review of manuscripts and grant proposals. Of lesser significance: leadership in professional scholarly organizations, conference planning, public lectures on topics to religious or general audiences, creation or development of Web sites related to religion or the teaching of religion.

Expectations for Accomplishment at each Stage of Review

- The Department recognizes that the trajectory of each candidate's career will develop at a different pace, with different emphases and outcomes over time. Nevertheless, the Department expects all candidates for review to show evidence of sustained engagement with scholarship across the arc of their careers. A candidate whose dossier includes a manuscript must provide documentation regarding the stage of the formal review process for publication at which the manuscript stands. As rank advances, growth as a scholar, balanced against increased evidence of service to the institution and to the profession, may manifest itself in increased engagement with other types of scholarship in addition to original research.

- The comprehensive review preceding the tenure review (commonly in the fourth year)
 - For this review the candidate should provide evidence of a coherent agenda of original research and consistent engagement in scholarly activity during each year of appointment to date. Evidence may include (in roughly descending order) appropriate published work, presentation of scholarly papers in appropriate venues, and work in progress.

- Tenure and promotion to the rank of Associate Professor
 - In presenting evidence of achievement—and not merely promise—a candidate for tenure and promotion to Associate Professor ought to focus on original research.
 - A candidate for tenure and promotion to Associate Professor is not required to have published a book; without a book, the candidate should *typically* present at least two or three scholarly articles in major peer-reviewed journals.

- Promotion to the rank of Professor
 - A candidate for promotion to this rank must present evidence of continued scholarly publication of significance, *typically* based on original research. Other types of scholarship may also be presented.
 - New work presented for review may reflect a deepening of one's original scholarly focus or engagement with a new field.