

The study I conducted this summer (funded by Funding for Innovative Teaching and Learning) with Dr. Eric Thurman as sponsor represents the first step in an effort to explore what students at liberal arts colleges think about the Bible. More specifically, it seeks to formulate a research tool to discover what students know and assume about the Bible, what value (if any) they ascribe to the Bible, why they take classes in biblical studies, what they hope to learn in such classes, and what they actually learn. The hope was that by gathering and analyzing such data, the study will lead to the creation of a body of knowledge about student assumptions and expectations that will help biblical studies professors in several ways: to reflect on their current course rationales and approaches; to more adequately align courses goals, interpretive approaches, pedagogical methods, and learning outcomes with student needs; and to reflect on the place of biblical studies in the liberal art curriculum more broadly.

The study consisted of four parts that entailed six weeks of work. Part one involved reading and producing summaries of scholarly books and articles on biblical literacy and pedagogy. These summaries provided the required working knowledge I needed to formulate questions on student perspectives about the Bible and the liberal arts that would later be incorporated into a survey. Part two involved studying and assessing previous research surveys on the Bible and biblical literacy conducted by groups like Gallup, Barna, and the Pew Foundation. This research provided me insight into what questions have been asked in the past as well as their methodological limitations. Part three involved developing the survey tool itself. This work also included exploring current survey methodologies through the use of online

guidelines and informative books from the library. The survey formulation process was the main goal of internship. Dr. Thurman and I met weekly to share thoughts and perspectives on our findings, which proved very beneficial for the progression of my formulating the survey.

I have now agreed to continue working on this project as Dr. Thurman and I now proceed into the fourth stage—identifying and contacting professors and staff at a select number of liberal arts colleges to ask for their assistance in conducting the survey. We plan on distributing the survey and making plans for collecting the results this fall and using the results to inform my senior thesis.

As a religion major, being able to conduct research within the religious studies discipline gave me the unique opportunity to better understand the professional work of scholars of religion and religious studies and the benefits of such research in a larger context. I additionally gained a deeper appreciation in the art of survey-making and the attention required for sifting through large amounts of data in order to find relevant data.

I have been interested in the field of education and teaching as a career path since before college, and through this internship I was able to further explore different areas within the educational field. I now have a better understanding of the inner politics and complexities that circulate within course selection and requirements within liberal arts universities. This internship proved to be a highly valuable research experience and will continue to influence my studies of religion in my senior year and even possibly in grad school.