

Re-envisioning the Theological Library: New Models of Service (Public Services Interest Group)

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Among the trends listed in the ACRL 2010 Top Ten Trends in Academic Libraries is the expectation that “the definition of the library will change as physical space is re-purposed and virtual space expands.” Speakers from three institutions will discuss how their libraries have responded to the need to re-purpose existing space and to design services that enhance new modes of education and scholarship. Leland Deeds will present the library’s Multimedia Creation Lab, a space dedicated to the exploration and creation of digital, multimedia objects for instruction in the seminary and the church. Anthony Elia will discuss the integration of a writing center/or user driven space into the theological library. Eileen Saner will discuss creating user focused space in a new library. Speakers will address the challenges of staffing a new service, how they promote synergies between physical spaces and virtual space, services, and the culture of the seminary or school, and describe how they promote their services.

Part 1: “Modeling the Business of Theological Libraries in the Twenty-First Century: Writing Centers and More” by Anthony J. Elia

What is the business of a theological library? That’s probably a funny-sounding question, first of all because we probably don’t think about theological libraries having “business.” Rather, I believe we like to think of them as having “purpose,” such that we can ask, “What is the purpose of a theological library?” We can still answer these questions in the same way, but it is more about how we ought to begin thinking or re-thinking the role of the theological library in the twenty-first century, and that is in terms of business. Why? Some might consider this to be a blasphemous claim or assertion, but perhaps the truth comes in advertising. In this harsh period of economic troubles that has found its way into more than a few libraries, especially seminary libraries, we find that talk often revolves around money, finances, and economic cutbacks. The question “What is a theological library?” is no longer viable, but should be reconfigured to the more sustainable “What CAN a theological library become?” The key part of this logistical and lexical shift is in the motion from stasis to action. Many of us know from experience that libraries change very slowly, and, in some cases, theological libraries may be the worst offenders. This is not the debate. What is the debate is how we can better promote our institutional libraries so that our parent institutions can understand and value both the tangibles and intangibles in a light that is a model of good business, while not compromising or dismissing the academic and scholarly rigor of our library operations. In short, the key word used time and again for the modern worker—librarian or not—is *versatility*.

In the last decade, it may be true that newly minted librarians are more likely to have graduated library school without taking classes in either cataloguing or reference (the bread and butter courses of erstwhile LIS education), but have surely been trained in the intricacies of HTML. The key lesson in contemporary library schools in many ways is versatility—the question of a graduating senior is likely to have changed over 25 years from “What library can I get a job at?” to “How can this *degree* get me a job?” (And note I didn’t say “library job.”)

Now, this leads me back to “What is the business of a theological library?” because the question of a decade or two ago would certainly have been answered differently in most cases. Libraries are taking on more responsibilities for various reasons, and many of these responsibilities include such things as technology instruction (different from classical “bibliographic instruction”), copyright seminars, website-design workshops, and writing centers, among others. These sorts of things would have come under the former “instructional” roles of reference and research librarians, but have evolved gradually.

Today I would like to share with you briefly a discussion of one of our new ventures that we are now in the “business of conducting.” This would be the Burke Library Writing Center. The Writing Center was conceived as a project under the auspices of the library in coordination with the Academic Dean of Union Theological Seminary. Its programming was guided by student needs (mostly MA and MDiv, though PhD students were included). The library vetted, interviewed, and hired a PhD student as the writing tutor at the beginning of the fall 2010 term and allotted the tutor 15 hours per week to perform writing center duties. The student tutor would then meet regularly with me (Head of Public Services and the tutor’s supervisor) and the Dean. We gathered statistics and discussed best practices for improved service.

The main duties of the tutor were to review and accept most appointments and walk-ins for consultations on research and papers. During evening hours, when a reference librarian was not on duty, the tutor also served as temporary reference help where needed. But the focus of the center was to provide assistance and guidance on proper research and writing techniques. The tutor relied in part on the works of Lucretia Yaghjian (“Writing Theology Well”) and Wayne Booth (“The Craft of Research”), both of which are tremendously helpful and insightful. Mid-semester, the tutor arranged and led an evening seminar called “Writing With Clarity” where students and librarians joined in to discuss and review methods of better theological writing. Along with snacks and drinks, there was good discussion, and the event was highly successful.

“Research Practices in Theological Inquiry,” a course taught during the fall semester through the library (in fact, I taught this class in 2010 and will teach it again in 2011), covers some of the material that would be helpful to students doing research and writing papers for classes. But this class has a broader goal than just teaching how to write well—its purpose has been to give students a safe space for discernment of their nascent seminary experience in learning. Most students are first years coming from second, third, or fourth careers into seminary and ministry. It is a class that asks students to question and identify what “research really is.” What are the politics of research? What are the angles and understandings behind how people do research in different fields of religion, Bible, theology, ethics, and so forth? What does it mean to “cite” something vs. “quote” something, and does this matter? How do we understand the politics and sociology of footnoting? What is plagiarism? How is plagiarism understood cross-culturally, by people from cultures, for example, where “copying” another’s idea is seen not just as flattery but actually as referential and expected? How do we understand and incorporate and discern such differences? These are just some questions that are asked.

These same students were encouraged to have learning partners and, later on in the semester, begin to consult with the writing tutor. This worked out extremely well. Additionally, a second for-credit course was added for the spring 2011 semester, which was an in-depth writing course

modeled on the Writing Center and its approach to theological writing and revision, and included how to write topical papers in ethics, history, and biblical studies, for example. The course was taught by the same PhD student who was the Writing Center tutor.

Both the Writing Center and the classes have been highly successful. The center itself, which started off at 15 hours per week, boasts an almost completely full schedule of users signing up for consultation in slots from ten minutes to an hour. The classes, too, have had fairly high enrollment for their first year: at least 14 in the first semester and around the same for the second semester. The courses are single-credit courses.

Looking to the future, we ask ourselves again now, after a successful year of instruction and writing assistance behind us, “What is the business of the library?” It is a model that seems to be working. And in this era when both economics and accreditation are high priorities in our institutions, we should think about the re-branding of our libraries through such means. For our purposes, the enacting of a writing center and for-credit courses in research and writing instruction have been greatly beneficial for learning assessments of students and enhancing our relationship with our parent institutions.

Two codas to our developing “business” of theological librarianship, which are considerations for us, include educational (or academic) technology and individualized “My Librarian” programs. In brief, as the role of technology grows and its demand increases in our seminary and institutional libraries, so, too, does the demand for specialists. In one of my previous library positions, the role of academic technologist became more relevant and in-demand. In subsequent years, I’ve been called upon as a consultant in this field to help develop online communities of theological learning in disparate but connected seminary and church locales. At my present workplace, the Burke Library and Union Theological Seminary (UTS), the demand for both traditional and non-traditional technology is becoming ever more apparent. So, too, is the need for a full-, or at least part-time, technologist. One of the most successful and popular technological (and pedagogical) tools introduced this year in the UTS community by library instructional staff was the cartoon software “Xtranormal.” Students in both research and field education classes were instructed on how to create relevant dialogue and enter it into the user-friendly web-based software, which would within seconds convert the dialogue into animated cartoon characters. The success of this tool could be seen in such cases where students created dialogues between characters about theological research methods, accented with humor, but demonstrating mastery of course content; the other area of success was when students in field education courses used the Xtranormal software to discuss uncomfortable topics with their teen-age youth groups—interns would assign topics to students about sexuality or violence and ask students to write dialogues about the topics using the software. In this case, the students could indirectly think and write about relevant issues presented by their youth leaders and interns without feeling embarrassed or ashamed; the content was engaged, but once-removed through avatar-style cartoon characters. All of this was directed from just another area of library instruction . . . or “business.”

The last item I want to touch on just briefly is the “My Librarian” program. Though the Burke Library has not yet employed this, it has been successful at other schools, and, in fact, is being spoken about at this conference, in the case of Yale Divinity School’s program. I first took this approach into consideration after attending a Reference Committee meeting

at Columbia University recently, where we were told of the successes at Barnard College (our institutional neighbor) by our fellow librarians there. At this time, we are still in the planning stages of this approach and think that there will be lessons to be learned from the successes of both Barnard and Yale Divinity.

In conclusion, then, when I speak about “business” in theological libraries, I am not advocating that we become corporate money-making machines and turn our back on our missions to theological education and librarianship. Rather, I’m advocating for our great versatility as librarians and professionals, where we craft our work to fit non-traditional needs while fostering, supporting, and encouraging creativity. *That* is what our business should be.

Part 2: “Multimedia Creation Lab at William Smith Morton Library, Union Presbyterian Seminary” by Leland R. Deeds

In the fall of 2008 Union Presbyterian Seminary (UPSem) renovated and rechristened the former Spence Library as the Allen and Jeannette Early Center for Christian Education and Worship. There was a great sense of need among support faculty and students to find ways to fully utilize this new technologically enabled facility. It was in this context that what became the Multimedia Creation Lab (MCL) was first developed at the William Smith Morton Library (WSML). While there was initial debate as to whether the lab should be set aside for faculty only, the basic outlines of what the lab would support was agreed upon—basic creation and editing of digital images, audio, and video for use as learning objects for instruction.

The MCL, conceptually, was drawn out as anything from a two- to a ten-workstation-sized facility during early discussions. The philosophy of what would go in to the MCL was consistent, however; the lab would be aimed at “consumer level” equipment that faculty and students who might use the lab could conceivably replicate with a modest budget. It was also important, because of limited staff resources, that the hardware be easy to use and that the software have good, readily available help and tutorial material because creating such resources on a local level wasn’t viable. Our own modest budget was then drawn up and one-time funding requested.

Once funding was obtained, working with the Director of Technology & Media Services, the following hardware and software was procured:

Hardware	Software
Standard Core 2 Duo Dell desktops Epson large format flatbed scanner Logitech webcams Canon point-n-shoot digital camera Panasonic digital camcorder Flip digital camcorder Sony digital voice recorder USB headsets	Adobe Element Photoshop Adobe Element Premiere Audacity Windows Movie Maker GIMP 2

Two additional pieces of software were also installed in the MCL on single workstations: Paperport, a product for PDF file creation, and Camtasia & SnagIT, added primarily for creating screen-casts and training videos. Outside of the lab, we’ve worked with PBworks for



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