

Independent scholars

Some scholars, for various reasons (temperament, scholarly interest, employment choices, or lack thereof) choose to be independent scholars. All this means is that they do not have an academic institutional affiliation, though most of them work for a living somewhere. There are advantages to such a choice: no dull faculty meetings, no boring teaching assignments, the ability to pursue one's own research interests. However, disadvantages accrue as well: often lack of library privileges, no institutional structure for benefits, economic problems, and the need to work outside the field in order to fund one's work inside it. Some of those who are called independent scholars are really religious studies-trained colleagues who work in fields other than academia, so that term can cover a rather dubious assumption about our homogeneity.

Independent scholars are more than welcome as part of the AAR/SBL, especially in women's circles where the matter of affiliation is decidedly secondary. The AAR Annual Meeting now has a gathering time for independent scholars. Still, we advise sensitivity and awareness all around so that the subtle agenda that we all be employed at recognizably respectable places not rear its ugly head. Some of the best work in the field is still done by people who are not tenured anywhere.

Institutional analysis

In order to survive and thrive in religious studies, it is crucial to analyze the institutions in which we do our work. Academic religious studies takes place in a variety of institutional settings: public institutions and private institutions, large research universities, smaller liberal arts colleges, colleges with religious affiliations, seminaries, community colleges, and independent centers and institutes.

Experiences in the academy will vary greatly depending on the type of institution(s) in which one does one's work and with which one interacts. Requirements for promotion and tenure, teaching loads, expectations about the level of involvement