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# Research Support Services for Religious Studies

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# RESEARCH SUPPORT SERVICES FOR RELIGIOUS STUDIES

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY  
HAROLD B. LEE LIBRARY REPORT

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BYU Research Team: Trevan Hatch, Ryan Lee, & Gerrit van Dyk

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## Introduction

Brigham Young University, an institution owned by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) is a unique place for religious studies. The two subject librarians on campus who cover topics related to religion are the liaisons to roughly seventy full-time faculty in the college of Religious Education, twenty-five adjunct instructors in the same college, and an additional two-dozen or more full-time faculty in other departments who frequently publish, teach, or both on religious studies topics. With nearly one hundred full-time research and teaching faculty on campus who specialize in religion-related topics, Brigham Young University offers no undergraduate degree in “religious studies.” All 30,000 students, however, must complete several Religious Education courses throughout their programs. These courses focus primarily on religious living and devotional interpretations of religion and scripture, and less on the academic methods and theories of religion.

Despite the more devotional approach to religion at Brigham Young University in relation to the students, most faculty have doctoral degrees in religious studies or related fields. They regularly publish in academic venues on religion. In addition to this active publishing role, most of these same faculty dabble in (at least), or are fully immersed in the field of Mormon studies. For this reason, we chose to interview exclusively Mormon studies scholars, even though numerous other faculty specialize in various fields, like Islam, Judaism, biblical studies, Egyptology, and the eastern religions. The combination of academic publishing expectations with devotional professional expectations (teaching and publishing) make this an intriguing population to analyze.

## Method

The methods of this study are presented in detail in the full Ithaka report, so it will not be presented again here; however, a few sample characteristics are discussed. The difficulty with a sample of Mormon studies faculty at Brigham Young University is that the smallest amount of information may often reveal the identity of the participants. Thus, in the spirit of anonymity, only a dearth of information on the sample is provided.

The sample consisted of twelve faculty, ten male and two female. A much higher percentage of the faculty body at Brigham Young University is female; however, female Mormon studies scholars who were available to be interviewed were scant. Eight faculty were tenured at the time of the interview and four were pre-tenured. The specialties among this sample range from textual analyses of Mormon scripture to all periods of Mormon history, but primarily the nineteenth century.

## Findings

This section presents the findings in three categories: *Challenges and Opportunities*, *Research Methods and Needs*, and *Publishing Practices*. Unlike a traditional qualitative article that adds commentary and discussion to the themes and quotes, this report simply illustrates the common themes with thick narrative quotes, but with minimal commentary and discussion. This report also contains a summary of findings in the appendix.

### Challenges and Opportunities

One of the interview questions was: *What are the greatest challenges and opportunities facing Mormon Studies?* The following section is structured into two main parts, the challenges and opportunities. Each part contains multiple emergent themes from the data.

#### “Gazing at our own navel.”

One of the challenges for Mormon studies, per several participants, is for BYU scholars to get outside of the Mormon-exclusive bubble and start engaging the broader academic community. Related is the quest to deal with broader issues in religious studies. Consider the four following quotes:

**Male full professor:** We’ve had a tendency to gaze at our own navel that way, and to study ourselves solely within the confines of our own experience. I think as we mature we’re going to be able to, and we’ll want to say “Okay, let’s take a look at this within an interfaith context—Catholicism, Protestantism, non-Christian religions, in terms of statistics but also in terms of thought and intellectual performance.” I think you’re going to see much more of that, and that’ll be generated in large part because of where our staff’s coming from. For instance we have one on our faculty now who’s from Italy, an Italian Latter-day Saint, but guess where his interests are? He’s interested in looking at the church in Europe, particularly Italy, and in context with the Catholic Church. And another member of the faculty is a convert from Greek Orthodoxy, so where are his interests? How does our doctrine compare to orthodoxy? I really welcome that kind of Religious Studies milieu, rather than just focusing on ourselves so much... And I think it’ll be a much richer kind of work.

**Male assistant professor:** I would honestly try to avoid those who are firmly just in the Mormon side. A lot of them are closed-minded, or don’t want the other side to exist. They

don't see the value of both sides, which it can't function unless there's tension between the two. This is good tension. Because it makes those who are internal really have to take their stuff serious and do better work. And those on the outside to really struggle to use their work to produce bigger histories... I don't know... As a believing Mormon and as an apologist at heart, but an academic by training, like, it's hard not to straddle and value them.

**Male associate professor:** Getting outside ourselves, of broadening our vision and scope, of how we want to look at Mormonism. You know, for so many years, we've looked at Mormonism from a vantage point, of course devotional, persuasive, you know, that's important. We want to be faithful, we want to have testimonies, and it's all very important stuff... But when you're talking about the academy, we're just not there yet. We're not there... So the challenge I see is trying to get outside our own little bubbles that we've created here [at BYU].

**Female assistant professor:** I think it's sometimes frustrating because people [in Mormon Studies] are arguing over like, okay well was that a carriage or was it a wagon? Like who cares—right? But some people care very deeply about if it was a carriage or a wagon. And so I feel like... a lot of people who are academics are trying to tell us “no, larger ideas, larger ideas.” And I feel like there's a lot of resistance to that.

The quest to broaden the field of Mormon studies is evident in the fact that the primary focus in the field seems to be on the founding of Mormonism, the early to mid-nineteenth century. Consequently, according to the following comment from a participant, scholars in the Mormon studies bubble tend to step on each other's toes:

**Male assistant professor:** I do think... the majority of all research happens in the first couple of decades of Mormonism. Like, most people are working on foundational issues in Mormonism, myself included. Now, as soon as I'm done with my current projects I plan on bailing on those because over and over you step on people's feet... I've stepped on a million toes. I've had to reinterpret stuff. In the end, it's like there's more fight than there is consensus. You know what I mean? And, and it's simply because the state of the field depends on the Joseph Smith era, and the Joseph Smith papers aren't making that any better. They're— the church is emphasizing Joseph Smith era is more relevant than any other era, and even if that is true, and I'm not saying that it is, there is so much more to do. Name the 20th-century people doing 20th-century Mormon studies... There's like, only a handful of individuals who do 20th-century... So, my own feeling about that is, I just want to get the “H” out of dodge. Like, I want to do something new and fresh. I'm sick of revisionist history. So, the *Mormon Studies Review* is requiring to people to think more theoretically, and requiring them to think more globally, and I think their push is probably the most relevant push.

### “There aren’t jobs.”

The need to broaden the field of Mormon studies is, perhaps, related to finding jobs. According to several participants, graduate students find difficulty landing tenure-track academic positions if they publish exclusively in Mormon studies. This phenomenon impacts research agendas. The field may struggle because it requires numerous high-quality researchers to advance ideas in multiple areas. The field, however, may not be able to produce a sufficient number of “Mormon Studies” scholars because young researchers are entertaining broader research questions outside of Mormon studies in order to find jobs and subsequently get tenure. Some participants discussed this challenge, as illustrated by the following two quotes:

***Male associate professor:*** The challenge is there aren’t jobs. There aren’t academic jobs. You can probably get published, but you may not get a job. And that is really, really difficult... To think you’re going to go and get a PhD in something related to Mormon studies and get a job— that, I mean, these are scary times for PhD-holding academics. And so while Mormon studies seems to be able to manage a certain bulk of publications, there isn’t a corresponding bulk of positions. There just isn’t. At Claremont Graduate University [there’s] a handful of students who are studying Mormon studies in a kind of explicit, open way, some of them LDS, some of them not LDS. Their job prospects are dim. I mean they are making a real kind of career roll of the dice, and they know that. They know they are, and it’ll be interesting to see over time if more Mormon studies positions proliferate. What would this actually— what can the market... you know, handle? Is Mormon studies’ popularity, both in terms of endowed chairs and publication, actually signaling a false sense of presence, in terms of what the academic job market can actually handle? That’s a real obstacle and challenge right now. It’s a worry for a lot of us because while the field is vibrant, and there’s a lot of good work going on, can these people get jobs? ... When I was in graduate school, the operating assumption was: you better do something else. You better do something else, you better write on something other than Mormonism. If you’re lucky you can come back to it at some point, but don’t try and form a career around Mormon studies. That would be suicide. Were we right? Has that changed? I’m not convinced it’s changed. I think you can get a book published, but I’m not sure you can get a job. So, challenge indeed.

***Male assistant professor:*** I still hear from quite a few people, especially you know people that are in graduate school or recent graduates, that studying Mormonism as a Mormon still might be an impediment to getting a job, to being seen as a viable candidate. I hope that’s diminishing, and I’m optimistic, you know, I think we can see some, some great people who are doing that. But I would say it probably isn’t— you know, we need scholars who are doing Mormonism and something else you know, and who do that well, that integrate Mormonism well into what they’re doing. And I’m

optimistic that it won't be an impediment, that it will be a plus. But yeah, so that broadening is what I'm hoping for.

**Male full professor:** If you have an interest in American History, there are lots of places where you can teach American History worldwide, but if you're interested in Mormon studies, even with the growth in the last few years of other places that are interested in Mormon studies, whether it's Claremont, or wherever it might be, there's still a very limited number. And so the competition is extremely intense and fierce. And there's just not the number of openings for people... Because the vast interest in Mormon studies is enormous, especially with the opening of the church archives and other repositories to more scholarship, it's attracted more and more people into it. It's a wonderful time to be a doctor or a lawyer or a businessman who has a real interest in Mormon history because they've got themselves established in their own field, and they don't need to have an income that's just solely supported by an academic position in Mormon studies... So I think they got to be flexible, to say okay I'm going to teach down at Texas Tech for five years in American Religious History, and then maybe if the opportunity presents itself I can teach at a place closer to the Mormon sources whether that's BYU or the University of Utah or someplace like that. But I think that's one of the big challenges that's facing us, always will—too many people chasing too few positions in the field.

### A time of transparency and openness

One of the opportunities in the field of Mormon studies is the call for openness, transparency, and academic freedom within the Mormon community. The appearance is that the previous generation was more guarded and that their primary goal was to defend the faith. Now, it seems that society has fostered a more transparent and intellectually honest approach. The following two quotes illustrate this transition:

**Male full professor:** The incredible openness and the invitation to study archival records that the Church has generated, is much more solid [than] when I was a graduate student. And this has been a breath of fresh air to be able to study the ambiguities of Mormon history from a perspective of faith, rooted in the archival documentation is a wonderful invitation to foster more and more quality research and scholarship. The openness of society generally, the academic community generally, to understand the richness of Mormon history, 20 years ago was kind of a flagrant sideline. Now it's a bona fide field of discussion and scholarship in our universe especially in the west, than there has been. I think that's a very, very refreshing thing. The openness of Church leaders to discuss our history and doctrine, and to admit perhaps to some mistakes in the past [is] very refreshing to scholars... I also think that [this] generation of students have been so well-trained to accept the challenges that our history poses... [They are] much more scripturally literate as well than when I was a student. They're more academically focused, they're more scripturally literate, and they're more open to new ideas, new

thoughts. They're not afraid. They're internet-formed so they do come with a bunch of questions, and we've changed our curriculum to meet those changing questions. And that's been good just to see that we're open to change in our curriculum, which has a profound impact on scholarship, is a very positive thing.

**Female assistant professor:** I really do think we're in a time where we are trying to be more transparent, and we have been given more access to records than we ever have been before... I mean I talk about the access that I can't get, but there's a lot of access that I can that I couldn't have gotten before. So I think there are some great opportunities. I also think that as Church leadership is a little bit more open to— not only open to, but they're trying to get us to be more involved with other interfaith groups, and working better with other religions, and they want that... I think before they may have been a little bit cautious, but now the green light is everywhere, just go, go, talk, work. And they have funding to help with that, which is fantastic... I think if I were to have called some of the colleagues I'm working with now and ask them, I think they'd be more guarded, but they're much more open to Mormon research. And I think they're much more interested in it too. There's a level of trust and just congeniality that's going on that, I think it's very refreshing.

### **“Mormonism is a major player now.”**

Several participants discussed at length that Mormon studies is much more accepted as a legitimate and viable field under the religious studies umbrella than it was previously. As mentioned in comments above, the academic community is open to publishing Mormon studies monographs and developing Mormon studies graduate programs at various universities. Consider the following two observations on these opportunities for the field:

**Male associate professor:** There is an audience both in terms of academic interest and publishing interest for Mormon studies. I mean, that's remarkable. You can stand a pretty good chance of getting published if you do good work in Mormon studies.

**Male full professor:** Well as far as opportunities, there's nearly 16 million of us. People know who we are! Mormonism is pretty much a major player now. And I've just been really impressed by the fact that we have these religious study programs with these chairs who will be able to teach at these major universities or campuses and bring in a Mormon studies component... To think this would have happened twenty years ago is pretty remarkable, we just didn't have any of those kinds of programs and with emphasis on Mormon studies, Mormon religious studies... We're getting more and more notice in terms of the religious community, I think we've been around in a sense, much longer historically they know who we are, but I think we've developed a pretty good core of Mormon scholars. I think BYU's been a major, major player in this. I look at the Maxwell Institute, and we have individuals across campus in linguistics, or history, or sociology, or family studies that are producing some wonderful scholarly materials, and

scholarly articles. The LDS church, their historical department, they're as professional a group as you can ever find, PhD trained historians and writers and scholars there.

### Scholarship: "We've only scratched the surface."

In addition to institutional transparency, the favorable publishing industry, and graduate academic opportunities in Mormon studies, several participants discussed the opportunities for scholarship. As mentioned above by a participant, scholarship in Mormon studies has been too narrow, or too focused on the founding years of Mormonism. Thus, the other aspects of this field are wide open, as discussed in the following two quotes:

***Male assistant professor:*** Well I think the greatest opportunities are that there are so many great questions to be explored. You know, Mormon history often feels well-documented, you know, it feels like well-traveled terrain and so sometimes I think people can say you know, well what is there new to say? I think in response to that, there is, we've only scratched the surface of things to say. Especially in questions in 20th century Mormonism, questions about lived religion. I think one thing that some of the wisest people, like Richard Bushman, what he's pushing for is how does Mormonism speak to bigger questions? You know, where is it going to make contributions into questions that are common to humanity? I think we're seeing that and I think that's huge opportunities... I think the great opportunity is the academy is ripening for [Mormon Studies] books. I think we're getting to that point where there's just enough interest in Mormonism...enough to hold attention.

***Male assistant professor:*** There are a lot of people who want to [study] Joseph Smith era, but, I mean that's like studying Elizabethan England. You have a million people doing it. Or saying, like, legitimately saying to yourself, can I write something new about World War II? Maybe, maybe, but I am not sure I care. So, like Joseph Smith era, I mean, the [Joseph Smith] Papers are coming up with some new significant things but that's because they had hidden documents. The other stuff is all interpretive... So, like, it is relevant, I'm a part of that so I don't really want to dis on it. I mean, honestly, Brigham Young is more interesting. You know what I mean? ... Think about James Talmage or Heber J. Grant. That era hasn't even been breezed over. And that guy changed the church as much as anyone, and possibly more than anyone.

## Research Methods and Needs

Interview questions regarding theoretical approaches and methodologies for research elicited some distinct differences between those who have achieved full (senior) professor rank, and those who are newer to the field. The majority of the respondents in all ranks referred to their training in historical, document-centric research principles, as illustrated in the following examples:

**Male full professor:** “I’m a very strong specifist, if I can use that term. I’m into the archival records. I don’t think that you can go too far wrong if you’re staying with the original documents.”

**Male assistant professor:** “[M]ethodologically, I am a documents-driven historian...[I] try to uncover and research in archives to draw out all the most pertinent sources...gathering significant journal accounts, contemporary accounts in newspapers...both print- and manuscript-driven research.”

**Male associate professor:** “[M]y methodology definitely is history, and so I use arguments and evidence that are grounded in historical methodology, meaning period documents that are read critically, contextualized, and placed in conversation with traditions of interpretation that I can identify and engage with, and so that’s very noticeable to anyone who reads my work is that though I do consider myself as working as a practitioner in religious studies as well, historical methodology is what characterizes my work.”

**Male full professor:** “I would say I self-identify primarily as a historian...”

**Male associate professor:** “I’m mostly a textual guy, textual analyses, these kinds of things...”

Many newer to the field, however, including all of the female professors interviewed, mentioned different theoretical and methodological approaches that supplement their research, reflecting the emerging multidisciplinary nature of the field of religious studies, even within the field of Mormon studies. Among these different approaches are the use of material culture, hermeneutics, ethnography, philosophy, theology, narrative theory, and literary studies, reflected in the following statements:

*Male assistant professor:* “I think probably most of my work would be characterized much more as...a narrative approach. I’m interested in documenting stories and trying to piece stories together....”

*Female assistant professor:* “[I]t took a lot of ethnography at first, to understand the culture of the people, and then personal interviews, and on-hand, working with people to gather information....”

*Male assistant professor:* “Recently, I’ve also began to examine theoretical models in religious studies and how that will– can affect my historical work. You know, things like material culture of religion....”

*Male associate professor:* “Philosophy in theology seems to be a place that is kind of on the rise in Mormon Studies.”

*Female assistant professor:* “So one of [my theoretical approaches] is narrative criticism, narrative theory. I do a lot because obviously my background is in literature. The other thing I do a lot with is New Historicism, so again coming from a literature background.”

Among the full professors, comprising six of the twelve interviewed, only two mentioned theories and methodologies outside the typical documentary analysis—one relied heavily on social and cultural studies, while the other mentioned using phenomenology and comparative studies.

While some of the full professors mentioned being influenced by social scientific theories, the majority emphasized historical methodologies that have dominated the field for some time. This seems to be unique in some ways to Mormon studies, since Mormon Church history is tied so closely to its culture and doctrine. The following statement is an example of this:

*Male assistant professor:* “[Y]ou just can’t get away from history. You can’t get away from asking questions about what do individual Mormons, and Mormon groups and Mormon publications...where do they come from, where do they stand in terms of Mormon historical events in Mormonism?”

In contrast, there appear to be recent trends in the field requiring religious studies scholars to have their feet in multiple disciplines, as reflected in the following quote:

**Male assistant professor:** “So I’m not really a historian, so to speak, although I’m going to have to do some history. I’m not really a theologian, although I do theology.”

There is also tendency in the field currently to try and distance Mormon studies from its emphasis on history, a trend within the broader field of religious studies for some time, as evidenced in the following two statements:

**Male associate professor:** “Mormon Studies has to this point been dominated by historical methodology. I think that’s fair to say. That being said, its rise has paralleled and come slightly behind the rise of academic religious studies. For instance, all of the Mormon Studies chairs now functioning in the American Academy, all of them exist within religious studies departments. None of them exist within history departments. That is telling. That says something about the way that religious studies has developed, and it says something about the way that Mormon Studies has developed as a corollary to that broader development of religious studies.”

**Female assistant professor:** “[I]t would be interesting...if [the title] was actually *Journal of Mormon Studies* rather than *Journal of Mormon History*...I personally think that’s where they should move it because I think they’re kind of struggling with keeping it as the *Journal of Mormon History*. I think it would be much more exciting if it was Mormon Studies.”

These distinctions in methodologies tend to trickle down to the types of data being produced by religious studies research.

### Data Production and Storage

The vast majority of those interviewed struggled with knowing how to answer the question about research data. Most envisioned statistical, qualitative data of some sort, which is not typical of those conducting primarily document analysis for their research. However, some data sets that were mentioned include digital recordings and transcriptions of oral histories; statistical data; and, biographical data. When probed further, most mentioned that they did collect and store notes from the documentary research, the majority of which are stored electronically. When asked about short-term data filing and storage, most respondents mentioned that the electronic files were stored either on their desktop or an external hard drive. One mentioned using Dropbox

to store files for easy access. There were also two interviewed who use paper filing systems, mostly for older data they still access occasionally. For long-term storage, however, only one of the respondents had a solid plan for depositing in a library or archive, although many mentioned having talked to repositories, or the need to talk to one before long. This was most prevalent with full professors, likely due to the amount of data they had and being nearer the end of their careers. Reasons for newer faculty not archiving their data included the desire for immediate access, or not really knowing what options were available.

### Sources for Research

When asked what sources they depend on, answers mirrored the research methods. The majority of respondents mentioned the need for access to primary source documents in archival repositories, along with access to secondary sources for contextual research. Specific sources mentioned include manuscripts, government documents, historical newspapers, oral history recordings and transcripts, and periodicals. To locate these sources, every respondent mentioned the use of online search engines, catalogs, and databases, often lauding the advantages of the digital age when compared to researching just a few decades ago, as one interviewee stated:

***Male assistant professor:*** “The digital age is creating a lot of easy ways to find stuff you wouldn’t have found unless you spent twenty years doing it.”

Most participants look to the campus library to provide access to many of these sources, as is evident in the following statement by another interviewee:

***Male full professor:*** “[W]e need a library [to collect and provide access to these sources]... We’re always looking at the library for the latest in periodical literature, and the finest in monographic based studies.”

However, with the advent of digital technologies, some even produced or supported by the campus library, one respondent lamented how this might affect the library:

**Male full professor:** “...I feel somewhat badly about the library itself, because if [the library] provide[s] this service, that means sometimes [researcher] don’t even go to the library.”

In the same statement, though, this respondent made an insightful comment on the future of library:

“But maybe our libraries are becoming more archives for these kinds of things as well as depositories for what we do produce, versus an actual place where you go.”

### Challenges in Conducting Research

While many of those interviewed were complimentary of what the local campus library did to collect and provide access to many sources, there were still many challenges to their research, some which the library could help mitigate, and some over which the library has no control. The number one response to questions about challenges was access, primarily access to restricted records. In the Mormon studies field, many of the historical sources are held at the LDS Church History Library in Salt Lake City. This library has a history of difficulty in accessing records, mostly due to the library’s policies regarding restricted access to private, sacred, and confidential records. Sometimes this leads to avoiding use of the repository all together, as is reflected in the following statements:

**Male assistant professor:** “I’ve made a few requests, most have been denied and so I think that, maybe that just leads you to not make as many requests, and sometimes you think, ‘I don’t know if I have the time to request this or wait...so I’ll just try to come at this question from a different angle.’”

**Female assistant professor:** “One [challenge] is obviously the Church History Library, which is next to impossible to get anything from, for me. It seems like it’s just...a hard resource. There is stuff that I absolutely know is there, but I...can’t get it because it hasn’t been made available.”

**Male full professor:** “The challenges in the past have been access to sources. Access to sources both in terms of institutionally held, and perhaps what are perceived to be sensitive sources by a given institution, perhaps in this case the LDS church archives.”

**Male associate professor:** “[A]ccessibility of pertinent documents [continues to be] a real question and problem.”

In contrast, some senior professors did express that access has increased over the years, perhaps a reflection of their past experience, including the following:

**Male full professor:** “...I think we have today much more open policy, certainly with LDS church archives, never been the case before.”

This same professor expressed potential reasons for this recent change in openness and accessibility to Mormon-related records:

“[T]here were many other factors involved, just changes in society, and a greater trust in the work of Mormon scholars. A greater need for the church itself to have its history written [pause] more clearly and carefully than was the case in the past.”

This challenge of access is not limited to this one repository either. Some of those interviewed mentioned that in the field of religious studies in general, there seems to be a lack of trust for some researchers, and a sensitivity in religious collections towards who should be allowed access. It is often who you know and your reputation that is key to being allowed access to certain records, as shown in the following quotes:

**Female assistant professor:** “... [M]y experience is when I know the right people and I talk to the right people, I just get a lot more done than if I have to go through an administrative track.”

**Male full professor:** “Access to collections is a lot of times done by a very close network of scholars, and so...it’s hard sometimes to get into these, and a lot of times you have to end up working for years...to improve your bona fides to make the right contacts and then you’re almost invited in...”

Unfortunately, there appears to be some privileging that occurs at some repositories with religious studies records, regardless of faculty status or gender.

Another challenge mentioned regarding research in Mormon studies specifically was the volume of records, and the lack of a single portal to search and know all possible sources. Mormon studies collections are scattered in several repositories across the nation, and the

number of scholarly journals and presses publishing Mormon studies research are increasing rapidly. Some respondents expressed the fear of missing major sources because they are either made available in some obscure place, the descriptions are inadequate, or the online tools are not reliable in locating all possible sources. This fear and frustration is reflected in the following statements:

**Male full professor:** [W]e [in Mormon Studies] are woefully behind the rest of the world in organizing the Mormon library in a way that somebody can come and, and be confident that they've now found everything that's been said on a particular topic."

**Male full professor:** "[K]nowing what actually is there, and knowing that a collection would be useful to me, I really have to often depend upon people who are archivists [to tell me about things that may not otherwise be discoverable because they are unprocessed]."

One final challenge mentioned by many of the respondents was lack of time. At BYU, emphasis is placed on teaching, but faculty are still required to publish. Many of those interviewed have a higher teaching load than other departments due to BYU's requirement that all students take religion classes. As a result, adequate time to research is a major issue that many faculty in religious studies at BYU have to deal with. This challenge is summarized in the following statement:

**Male assistant professor:** "I still find myself struggling with this...how to carve out time...that's dedicated to research and writing, with...the ever-present...demands of teaching always looming....Because I think good research requires...time and time to think, and time to poke around, time to...ask...what am I missing. I worry about that."

### Keeping Up with Trends

For those interviewed, keeping up with trends was pretty consistent across the board, regardless of faculty status, with the top two answers being reading academic journals (11 of 12) and attending professional conferences (8 of 12). However, for senior faculty, conferences were the primary mode of remaining abreast of recent scholarship in the field, while newer faculty placed

emphasis on reading major scholarly journals. Other activities mentioned include: reading books or book reviews, usually the latter due to time constraints; bibliographies of recent scholarship; networking with other scholars, both in person and via email or other electronic means; and, social media such as blogs and podcasts. There was no clear distinction in these activities between senior faculty and newer faculty members.

### Coping Strategies for Research

The final question related to research methods posed to interviewees was “If I gave you a magic wand that could help you with your research process – what would you ask it to do?” Answers varied greatly among those interviewed. However, one trend that occurred among most of the answers was the idea of increased and quicker access to relevant sources. While most acknowledged that access, particularly online, digital access, had improved greatly over the past decade or so, there is always room for further development, particularly in full-text searching.

The following quotes reflect the specific desires of most interviewed:

**Male full professor:** “[My wish would be] more sources digitized, more that are readily available, and frankly...better OCR (Optical Character Recognition).”

**Male assistant professor:** “[I]f there was a huge journal database that was searchable, that would be fantastic.”

Not only do religious studies scholars want convenient access from their own computers, they also want assurance that they are getting the best and most comprehensive lists of the most important sources. Several interviewed expressed the fear of missing something in their research, and the desire for tools to help in revealing unknown or little known sources. The following examples express this:

**Male associate professor:** “Make appear all the sources that I currently don’t know about.”

**Female assistant professor:** “[My dream would be] a search engine ... [with] all the new material that’s coming out, that they can actually...put it into one place....”

This dream is a central hub of sorts that provides access to any and all sources potentially available on any given topic within the field of Mormon studies, a solution to one of the challenges stated earlier. The same interviewee also admitted that it would not be perfect, but just having something to rely on would alleviate some of these fears of missing sources:

“[Y]ou know not all of it’s there, but the idea that...a blurb about it is there so that I would know ... I should be going to these things....”

Besides these tool-based solutions to research challenges that librarians and other such professionals could provide, some also expressed issues specific to BYU, all seen as obstacles to producing quality scholarship, including the following:

**Male full professor:** “The funding is less of a problem than the time. Because, we, unlike a lot of other faculties, have to teach 32,000 students. All, all of them 14 credit hours. And so they’re coming through here by regiments, and...every semester is an invasion, and you’ve got to be ready for it. Because there’s no other way than teaching every one of them. Our teaching loads are higher here...but the expectations for scholarship are no less, or else we lose accreditation.”

**Male full professor:** “The biggest obstacle, interestingly enough here to in-depth scholarship by faculty in our department...Number one, family. Because we are so family-focused that—well you can’t take a leave because my kids are in school, or my wife is ill, or whatever the case is. We are so family-conscious, that to get away from family, to do the incubation kind of research that I’m talking about that requires in-depth time away is, ironically, one of our biggest obstacles. And the second one is church service, and that is ironic too, because we are here in the business of building the church, but when you have bishops and stake presidents, and we have a lot of them in our faculty because of the quality of the people who serve here, they can’t get away for a Fulbright. They can’t just leave and go okay I’m going to take 18 months and go and study over here or whatever it is, it’s very difficult if you’re...up to your neck in church service to [laughter] get away and write about the church. And that’s one of the great paradoxes that we face.”

**Male full professor:** “[W]hat I would like besides more money and more time, would [be] to have a clear institutional structure where I had two or three junior scholars in a graduate program...I feel limited being at an undergrad institution normally...If I were to become a premier researcher and more recognizable in the field today, I think...that would be one thing I’d need to address.”

These issues are a reflection of the aims and mission of BYU and the LDS Church who sponsors the school. While some work is being done to accommodate families for extended research leaves, there does not seem to be much potential for help in overcoming the other challenges expressed.

## Publishing Practices

The participants had much to say regarding their methods of publication, although they were largely homogenous. Due to its small scope, Mormon studies enjoys only a small number of peer-reviewed publishing outlets.

The respondents consistently mentioned the same journals and book publishers within which they attempt to publish, as can be seen from the following sample:

**Male assistant professor:** So, same places that I try to keep up with the literature [...] you have *Journal of Mormon History*, you have *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, you have *BYU Studies*, *Mormon Historical Studies*, [and] *Mormon Studies Review*. [...] There are also several [...] Mormon Studies series at, at University of Utah, Utah State, Oxford. There ... you know, Farley Dickinson, the RSC [Religious Studies Center at BYU], *BYU Studies*, the Maxwell [Institute at BYU].

**Female assistant professor:** So my publications would be [a non-LDS centric Association journal], and that's out of [an Ivy League school], and it's just a great— I just love that international group; As far as BYU, the *Religious Educator* here, *BYU Studies*, [...] the *Journal of Mormon History*, [and *Mormon Historical Studies*] and then *Deseret Book*, the *Ensign*

**Male full professor:** Well, for, ... Mormon studies, *Journal of Mormon History*, *BYU Studies*, *Utah Historical Quarterly*, *Dialogue*, *Sunstone*. There's the *Mormon [Historical Studies]*. Or with a University Press that has connections to Mormon studies. So, I [...] University of Illinois Press, [and] University of Utah Press.

However, where these professors tend to differ is why they publish in these venues. Some avoid traditionally Mormon studies publication outlets such as *Journal of Mormon History* or *BYU Studies Quarterly* due to audience questions and fit within the journal while others for the same reason choose to publish in Mormon studies journals.

**Male full professor:** [I] could send it out to some you know *Journal of Illinois History* and get a limited number of readership. At the same time, if I put it in a *Journal of Mormon History* or *Mormon Historical Studies* or *BYU Studies*, it's going to have a little broader readership.

**Male associate professor:** And so I've made a determination early on with various, either articles or edited volumes: what's the audience? And when the audience is a mixed one, I've opted for academic outlets away from BYU, and when I've wanted to write or edit for an LDS [Latter-day Saint] audience, I've looked to BYU-centered outlets

**Male full professor:** Interestingly, thus far relatively few pieces on Mormon Studies have appeared in the *AHR* [American Historical Review] or the *JAH* [Journal of American History] though a number have appeared in Church History [Journal]. Once in awhile you'll get something in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. So there's still need to further penetrate top tier journals, though top university presses such as Oxford for instance, do quite a consistent amount of publishing, at least in the last 10 or 15 years in Mormon Studies. Second tier journals, *Journal of Mormon History*, places like that also are places where you find Mormon Studies.

**Female assistant professor:** And so, you know, Oxford is interested in publishing things, [...] And so again I have been surprised at how many people have been putting together edited volumes and, some of them they've approached me, others I've heard about, you know and been like okay yeah, my research would fit into that [...]. [O]ne thing we always complain about around here [laughter] is that it's so hard to publish to the academy because people aren't interested in Mormons! But I would say at the moment, that actual argument is kind of dying.

One pre-tenured faculty member also brought up the difficulty of navigating the complex publishing world of Mormon studies as it relates to tenure and the academy:

**Female assistant professor:** [T]he first year I got here, it was just publish, the second year it was publish outside of [...] any Mormon venue [such as] BYU [publishers] or the *Ensign* or *Deseret Book*. [...] And now it's back to try to do both. , as far as BYU, the Religious Educator here, BYU Studies, the Mormon History Journal, [unintelligible word] Mormon history, the journal— I'm trying to think of which ones I have published in. The journal of, The Journal of Mormon History, the Religious Educator.

Perhaps due to this factor, the participants all have very similar responses to whether they publish in non-traditional outlets such as blogs, the classroom, or websites:

**Male assistant professor:** No... No, I just don't have time.

**Male full professor:** To this point, I focus more on the scholarly— I like to read the blogs, the *Juvenile Instructor* and so forth, and occasionally I'll post a comment, but, very, very occasionally. I don't have— I suppose I do have time but something would have to give [laughs] if I were to do that, you know?

**Female assistant professor:** I'm not a fan of the blog communities so. [laughter] I mean I think they're really interesting but I think, I don't know. Honestly I feel like time is so finite... I don't feel like, being in my position, that I have time to write or do anything that's actually not going to count towards [tenure].

**Male associate professor:** So I haven't published blogs in any way. I've done media interviews, and I've appeared in various media outlets, and so in a way that's kind of public presence for my work, but I've not published in those ways, and that has very much to do with kind of an institutional setting for my own work. I've been working towards tenure...at BYU, and I wanted my work to be aimed at peer-reviewed outlets that would count toward my tenure review. And so popular outlets have not drawn my attention. They just haven't.

Interestingly, while the publishing habits of most of the interviewees seemed quite similar, some did not feel they followed the same publishing path as their colleagues.

**Male full professor:** To other researchers? Well, I think from what I, I do, I— I'm pretty unusual.

**Male associate professor:** I don't know if we talk about that enough. [...] we're kind of a pretty diverse group, you know, that's, that's one thing about [us] [we're] pretty eclectic. I think so, I think they are typical. I think there is an understanding in Mormon Studies that there's a— there's a kind of [pause] series of popular outlets for LDS readers, there's kind of mixed outlets for a kind of hybrid academic-but-LDS readership.

**Female assistant professor:** I think I'm probably more varied. My interests are more varied I think, but I think [...] everyone would have their own varied group.

**Male associate professor:** I think so, I think they are typical. I think there is an understanding in Mormon Studies that there's a— there's a kind of ... series of popular outlets for LDS readers, there's kind of mixed outlets for a kind of hybrid academic-but-LDS readership.

The final question related to publishing habits was about open access options. Most had either some experience publishing via open access journals and all seemed in favor of doing so.

**Male full professor:** I like that. [...] I am a strong supporter of— making of Wikipedia, of information being given to everyone in the world as widely and as inexpensively as possible.

**Male associate professor:** I haven't, no. I know some of our colleagues have.

**Male full professor:** I actually use Academia.edu somewhat.

**Male associate professor:** I did, my first ... one of my first articles was a ... is a kind of open-access—peer-reviewed, but open access.

## Appendix: Summary of Findings

### **Challenges:**

- Getting outside the Mormon-exclusive bubble and engaging with the broader religious studies community
- The field is too focused and nuanced. It needs to start researching larger ideas
- The narrow focus has created a situation where scholars are stepping on each other's toes
- There aren't jobs in Mormon studies

### **Opportunities:**

- The Mormon institutional and academic culture is transitioning into a time of transparency and openness with access, archives, and academic freedom
- The Mormon studies publishing industry is robust. Scholars can get published in this field.
- Several graduate studies programs focusing on Mormon Studies have been developed in recent years (viz. Claremont Graduate University, University of Virginia, Utah State University)
- Although early Mormonism has been researched in depth for decades, almost all other time periods and aspects of Mormonism is wide open for researchers

### **Research Methods**

- Most of the participants are historians and work with primary documents, which seems to be a microcosm for the broader Mormon scholarly population
- Theological studies can't get away from history.

### **Data Production and Storage**

- Most participants struggled with the question on data production, and most lack knowledge about the options available to them.

### **Sources for Research**

- Most mentioned primary documents and access to archives to retrieve government documents, narrative journals, and historical newspapers

### **Challenges in Conducting Research**

- Access to restricted records is still a concern
- Networking and establishing trust with library archivists is key to gaining access because, in the Mormon community, researchers' motives are still being judged and questioned
- Sources are scattered. Many recognized the need for a robust Mormon studies database\

### **Keeping Up with Research Trends**

- Reading academic journals and attending conferences were mentioned most, followed by book reviews. Blogs and podcasts were mentioned, but rarely

### **Publishing Practices**

- Mormon studies scholars have aimed for a few of the usual journals and presses—Journal of Book of Mormon Studies, Journal of Mormon History, Oxford University Press, University of Utah Press, etc.
- Most don't have time to disseminate research and ideas through blogs and podcasts because they are busy chasing tenure
- Publishing in open access venues was favored, places like Academia.edu etc.