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Blind Men and Elephants:

A Multi-Method Analysis of Periodical Literature

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ABSTRACT

One blind man feels a tree. Another blind man feels something sharp, like a spear; and a third, feels something like a fan. All these men feel the same thing, an elephant, but different parts of it. This article looks at journal content through three separate lenses: faculty perception, citation analysis, and journal use. Each lens perceives journal value differently. Once these pictures are assembled, the challenge begins, attempting to understand what they compose. Like the disagreements these blind men had on what they were feeling, the data produced from these three lenses does not appear to coincide. It did however help in developing a greater appreciation of the collaboration needed between librarians and faculty to understand the elephant.

I. Introduction

The development of technology has brought about change everywhere from the printing press to the iPad. Giving a survey of this technological development, Neil Postman, in his book, *Technopoly* states that “every technology is both a burden and a blessing; not either-or, but this-and-that” (Postman, 1992, 4-5). These technological changes, whether good or bad, are consistent in academia and the library.

An example of change occurs when libraries switch databases. Variation in user interface and content generate new instruction and, consequently, a large learning curve. Students and faculty learn to align their research habits with the changes. These modifications often lead to questioning the value of a database. One aspect of a database’s value is its content.

Corban College transitioned databases in the summer of 2009. This alteration compelled the question: “What journals or magazines are important at Corban College?” There are many ways to measure the value of a journal: journal use, citation-based measures, and subjective judgments are three common measurement tools used (Kim, 1991). This study used all three methods, combining them to determine what journals are important at Corban College. The results showed no correlation between citation-based measures and journal usage. This begs several questions which have segued into conversations. These conversations are exemplars displaying the importance of library and faculty collaboration at Corban College.

II. Method

The first lens used to look at a journal’s value is usage. Journal use measures how often a journal is checked out in a library or looked at in a database. From one perspective, this is an excellent measuring tool: it is important for a

library to have content that patrons want and need. However, this should not be the only means by which a journal is measured. Usage stats can be skewed when an instructor uses an assignment of finding articles to get students comfortable with a database. The high usage of this certain journal would not necessarily reflect the research interests of the students. Because of situations like these, it is important to look at the value of a journal through more than one lens.

A second lens is citation-based measurements. These measurements rest upon the idea that if a journal is valued in a discipline, it is likely to be used more than other less-valued journals (Hustad, 1997). When scholars do research, articles are published to reflect that research. Citations reflect the resources used in that research. This measurement rests on the assumption that when different journal contributors make consistent reference to a set of journals, those journals have standing in that discipline.

There are some clear distinctions between what makes a journal scholarly versus popular. However, scholars who use and create the content of these journals have opinions about their value. Because of this, subjective judgment is a third lens often used when determining the reputation of a journal (MacMilan and Stern, 1987; Weber and Stevenson, 1981).

The subjective judgment of faculty plays an even more critical role when looking at theological journals. Often times, the scholar’s theological framework falls in line with that of their institution. Subjective judgments of faculty members provide an excellent framework to provide content that is not only respectable in a discipline, but respected and needed by faculty and students at a specific institution.

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Studies have been conducted using citation analysis (Jobber and Simpson, 1988) and subjective judgment (Coe and Weinstock, 1984) for business; usage statistics for library and information science (Kim, 1991), and citation analysis for humanities (Knievel and Kellsey, 2005). These methods individually have merit. However, theological journal analysis does not appear in the literature, nor did any of these studies use mixed methods. The current study looked at theological journal use using mixed methods, comparing and contrasting the results.

Every student minors in ministry at Corban College, thus theology courses are a requirement, making it one of Corban's biggest departments. For this reason, this research converged on the field of theology. Corban's ministry department teaches all of the theology, bible and ministry courses at Corban College. The head of the ministry department provided a list of journals that he considers critical for the discipline: *Bibliotheca Sacra* (*BibSac*), *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (*JETS*), *Criswell Theological Review* (*CTR*), *Master's Seminary Journal* (*Master's*), *Vetus Testamentum* (*VT*), and *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (*JSOT*). This professor's specialty is Old Testament studies. This study documented five years of citations from these six journals.

Citation-based measurements not only look at the number of times a journal or magazine is cited, they also compare those numbers with the total number of articles cited. This measure is called the impact factor (Kim, 1991). For example, *Christianity Today* was cited once in *BibSac*, seven times in *JETS*, five times in *CTR*, 11 times in *Master's*, and it was not cited in *VT* or *JSOT*. This is compared to the total number of citations in that journal. The total impact factor for *Christianity Today* is 0.0124. The total impact factor is determined by adding the impact factors of *Christianity Today* in these six journals and dividing by six, the number of journals analyzed. One could say that approximately 1% of the citations in these six journals were from *Christianity Today*.

Table 1

The Impact Factor of *Christianity Today*

Name of Journal	# of time this journal uses Christianity Today	Total # of citations in Journal	Impact Factor
Bibliotheca Sacra	1	488	0.0020
Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society	7	754	0.0093
Criswell Theological Review	5	253	0.0198
Master's Seminary Journal	11	254	0.0433
Vetus Testamentum	0	876	0.0000
Journal for the Study of the Old Testament	0	956	0.0000
Total Impact Factor			0.0124

The impact factor allows the citations of each journal to be treated equally, regardless of the number of citations they used. *VT*, *JSOT*, and *JETS* used more citations than *BibSac*, *Master's* and *CTR*. Without the impact factor, the citations used by *VT*, *JSOT*, and *JETS* would take precedence.

The impact factor permits a journal to be ranked higher if it is used less overall but more frequently throughout all journals. For example, *JETS* ranked the highest in impact factor even though it did not rank the highest in citations. *JETS* had 156 citations (31 in *BibSac*, 71 in *JETS*, 19 in *CTR*, 26 in *Master's*, three in *VT*, and six in *JSOT*), in comparison to 189 citations of *JSOT* (19 in *BibSac*, 12 in *JETS*, five in *CTR*, none in *Master's*, 46 in *VT*, and 107 in *JSOT*). Even though there were more citations of *JSOT* overall, the citations of *JETS* were more evenly distributed throughout the six journals, giving *JETS* a higher impact factor.

Much of Corban's theological journal content is accessed through databases. Corban College uses a database produced by the American Theological Library Association: *ATLASerials*. The administrative features of the database provided statistics for 2008 and 2009.

There is a difference between what a professor and the discipline see as valuable content and what students actually use.

These mixed methods provided an opportunity to look at journals through many lenses. They provided a means through which one could see what journals are respected in a discipline, what journals students actually use, and the chasm between the two.

III. Findings

Below is a list of Corban's top forty journals ranked by impact factor. A complete list of the top 100 journals is available in Table 6.

Table 2

Corban College's Top Forty Journals Ranked by Impact Factor

Journal Cited	Impact Factor	TOTAL #
Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society	0.0575	156
Journal of Biblical Literature	0.0569	235
Vetus Testamentum	0.0559	272
Bibliotheca Sacra	0.0508	119
Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft	0.0421	201
JSOT	0.0398	189
Catholic Biblical Quarterly	0.0362	147
Westminster Theological Journal	0.0256	77
Master's Seminary Journal	0.0190	31
New Testament Studies	0.0175	58
Biblica	0.0167	71
Journal of Theological Studies	0.0167	58
Tyndale Bulletin	0.0155	41
Journal of Near Eastern Studies	0.0142	54
Israel Exploration Journal	0.0124	65
Christianity Today	0.0124	24
Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research	0.0117	57
Grace Theological Journal	0.0109	26
Evangelical Quarterly	0.0108	29
Biblical Archaeology Review	0.0104	45
JSNT	0.0103	31

Trinity Journal	0.0099	26
Southwestern Journal of Theology	0.0096	40
Harvard Theological Review	0.0095	33
Biblical Theology Bulletin	0.0074	22
Interpretation	0.0073	23
Andrews University Seminary Studies	0.0070	23
Ugarit Forschungen	0.0067	36
Journal of New Covenant Theology	0.0066	10
Journal of the American Oriental Society	0.0065	31
Palestine Exploration Quarterly	0.0062	30
Revue Biblique	0.0062	26
Semeia	0.0056	27
Revue de Qumran	0.0056	23
Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft	0.0054	17
Biblische Notizen	0.0054	29
Tel Aviv	0.0054	30
Hebrew Union College Annual	0.0051	25
Expository Times	0.0050	14
Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages	0.0046	22

Five of the six journals analyzed appeared in the top ten ranking (*JETS*, ranked first; *VT* ranked third; *BibSac* ranked fourth; *JSOT* ranked sixth; and *Master's* ranked ninth) when measured by impact factor. All the journals (with the exception of *CTR*, ranked 72nd) valued by a faculty member have value in the discipline.

One interesting facet stood out for citations in journals published by evangelical institutions (*Bib Sac*, published by Dallas Theological Seminary; *JETS*, published by the Evangelical Theological Society; *CTR*, published by Criswell College; and *Master's*, published by Master's Seminary) compared with journals published by non-academic publishers (*JSOT*, published by Sage Publications; and *VT*, published by Brill): those published by

evangelical institutions tend to cite other journals published by evangelical institutions more frequently and those published by non-academic publishers and non-evangelical institutions do the same.

Table 3

Citations in Journals Published by Evangelical Institutions Compared with Journals Published by Non-Academic Publishers/Non-Evangelical Institutions

	BibSac/ JETS/CTR/ Masters	VT/ JSOT
Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society	147	9
Bibliotheca Sacra	114	5
Westminster Theological Journal	72	5
Master's Seminary Journal	31	0
Grace Theological Journal	24	2
Vetus Testamentum	33	239
Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft	28	172
Journal for the Study of the Old Testament	36	153
Israel Exploration Journal	7	58
Semeia	5	22

One journal that appears to be respected by both entities is the *Journal of Biblical Literature* (cited 88 times in journals published by evangelical institutions and 147 times in journals published by publishers).

This study also looked at the frequency of journal use. Comparing impact factor with usage statistics revealed some interesting findings. While many of the top journals were used in our databases, there were many journals accessed that were not in the top rankings of impact factor. A complete list of journals used in *ATLASerials* is listed in Table 7.

Table 4

The Top 20 Journals Ranked by Usage in *ATLASerials*

	Journal Title	# of uses in ATLA	Impact Factor Ranking
1	Christian Century	237	56
2	Interpretation	186	26
3	Bibliotheca Sacra	180	4
4	Catholic Biblical Quarterly	140	7
5	Theology Today	131	89
6	Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society	119	1
7	Review and Expositor	109	47
8	Journal for the Study of the New Testament	101	21
9	Journal of Biblical Literature	69	2
10	Baptist History and Heritage	55	172
11	Restoration Quarterly	55	137
12	International Review of Missions	53	298
13	Word and World	52	152
14	Journal of Ecumenical Studies	49	210
15	Christianity Today	47	16
16	Currents in Theology and Mission	42	247
17	Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion	41	227
18	Tyndale Bulletin	41	13
19	Vetus Testamentum	40	3
20	Perspectives in Religious Studies	40	275

For example, *Christian Century*, ranked 56th with the impact factor, had the highest use with 237 articles accessed. *Interpretation*, ranked 26th with the impact factor, came in second, being accessed 186 times. *Bib Sac*, ranked fourth using the impact factor, came in third with 180 articles accessed.

[*The*] question
looms: Why is
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While one must admit that not every journal cited in these six journals is available in *ATLASerials*, eight of the top ten are. Of these eight, only four journals: *Bib Sac*, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, *JETS*, and *Journal of Biblical Literature* were ranked in the top ten for the number of times they were accessed in *ATLASerials*.

There is a difference between what a professor and the discipline see as valuable content and what students actually use. This is reflected by the fact that three of the top five journals used come from non-evangelical traditions: Union Theological Seminary, which is Presbyterian, publishes *Interpretation*; the Catholic Biblical Association publishes *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*; and Princeton Theological Seminary, which is also Presbyterian, publishes *Theology Today*.

IV. Application

This project was an effort to understand which journals are important for Corban College's ministry department and thus important for the library. This study chose journals that had both a relatively high usage in *ATLASerials* and held a relatively high ranking in the impact factor. Combining the various methods used suggests that the following journals have importance for students and faculty.

Table 5

Top Journals Ranked by ATLA Usage and Impact Factor

Journal Title	ATLA Ranking	Impact Factor Ranking
Interpretation	2	26
Bibliotheca Sacra	3	4
Catholic Biblical Quarterly	4	7
Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society	6	1
JSNT	8	21
Journal of Biblical Literature	9	2
Christianity Today	15	16
Tyndale Bulletin	18	13
Vetus Testamentum	19	3

While the data above does provide something to work with, the results beg questioning. They suggest that there were two questions asked: What journals should Corban College's Library have to meet the needs of its faculty? Secondly, what journals should Corban College's Library have to meet the needs of its students? And a third question looms: Why is there such a gap between what the discipline and faculty value and what students use?

IV. Conclusion

The aim of this project was to discover what periodicals Corban College's library needs. While it did answer that question, the data produced more questions than it answered. Results were shared with the chair of the ministry department at Corban College, who was surprised at the results, particularly the student usage results.

Why is there such a gap? This question is hard to answer. While there are several factors that play a part, there is no clear and definite conclusion. More research needs to be done to discover why this gap exists.

This study provided a starting point for a conversation through which the library and the ministry department can work towards a unified goal: understanding the elephant. †

Table 6

Top 100 Journals ranked by Impact Factor

Journal Cited	Impact Factor	TOTAL #	ATLA Serials		BibSac	JETS	CTR	Masters		VT	JSOT
Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society	0.0575	156	119		31	71	19	26		3	6
Journal of Biblical Literature	0.0569	235	69		26	45	12	5		80	67
Vetus Testamentum	0.0559	272	40		22	6	4	1		134	105
Bibliotheca Sacra	0.0508	119	180		64	11	20	19		1	4
Zeitschrift fur die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft	0.0421	201			16	7	4	1		106	67
JSOT	0.0398	189	7		19	12	5	0		46	107
Catholic Biblical Quarterly	0.0362	147	140		25	20	10	0		36	56
Westminster Theological Journal	0.0256	77	25		23	35	4	10		0	5
Master's Seminary Journal	0.0190	31	38		3	1	0	27		0	0
New Testament Studies	0.0175	58			14	35	4	3		1	1
Biblica	0.0167	71			9	8	1	3		31	19
Journal of Theological Studies	0.0167	58			8	14	6	3		13	14
Tyndale Bulletin	0.0155	41	41		5	15	10	4		2	5
Journal of Near Eastern Studies	0.0142	54			1	9	6	2		19	17
Israel Exploration Journal	0.0124	65			0	6	0	1		20	38
Christianity Today	0.0124	24	47		1	7	5	11		0	0
Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research	0.0117	57			6	11	0	0		14	26
Grace Theological Journal	0.0109	26			11	4	3	6		0	2
Evangelical Quarterly	0.0108	29			4	14	6	3		2	0
Biblical Archaeology Review	0.0104	45			3	19	2	0		14	7
JSNT	0.0103	31	101		4	18	5	2		0	2
Trinity Journal	0.0099	26			6	10	3	5		2	0
Southwestern Journal of Theology	0.0096	40			4	10	3	0		5	18
Harvard Theological Review	0.0095	33	23		2	7	3	3		10	8
Biblical Theology Bulletin	0.0074	22			9	3	4	0		2	4
Interpretation	0.0073	23	186		7	5	2	2		0	7
Andrews University Seminary Studies	0.0070	23			6	10	0	3		3	1
Ugarit Forschungen	0.0067	36			1	0	0	0		18	17
Journal of New Covenant Theology	0.0066	10			0	0	0	10		0	0
Journal of the American Oriental Society	0.0065	31			5	2	0	0		13	11
Palestine Exploration Quarterly	0.0062	30			0	6	1	0		12	11
Revue Biblique	0.0062	26			0	0	3	0		12	11

Semeia	0.0056	27	20		1	3	1	0		8	14
Revue de Qumran	0.0056	23			4	7	1	0		6	5
Zeitschrift fur die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft	0.0054	17			4	7	2	1		2	1
Biblische Notizen	0.0054	29			1	0	0	0		12	16
Tel Aviv	0.0054	30			0	2	0	0		4	24
Hebrew Union College Annual	0.0051	25	9		3	3	0	0		6	13
Expository Times	0.0050	14	1		2	6	1	3		1	1
Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages	0.0046	22			1	0	0	1		9	11
Southern Baptist Journal of Theology	0.0045	10			1	4	3	2		0	0
Jewish Quarterly Review	0.0043	15			1	1	1	2		4	6
Novum Testamentum	0.0043	16	33		3	12	0	1		0	0
Biblical Archaeologist	0.0041	18	35		2	3	0	1		3	9
Journal of Semitic Studies	0.0041	17			3	2	0	1		5	6
Bible Review	0.0041	13			1	3	2	1		3	3
Review and Expositor	0.0040	11	109		6	2	2	0		0	1
Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament	0.0039	14			4	4	0	1		5	0
Journal of Egyptian Archaeology	0.0038	12			0	6	2	1		1	2
Calvin Forum	0.0037	13			0	11	1	1		0	0
Hebrew Annual Review	0.0035	15			2	0	1	0		2	10
Zeitschrift fur Theologie und Kirche	0.0034	15			1	1	1	0		7	5
Scottish Journal of Theology	0.0033	5			0	0	1	4		0	0
Vigiliae Christianae	0.0033	5			0	0	1	4		0	0
Biblical Interpretation	0.0032	16	2		2	1	0	0		1	12
Christian Century	0.0031	6	237		0	2	1	3		0	0
Journal for the Study of Judaism	0.0031	11			0	3	2	0		2	4
Biblische Zeitschrift	0.0031	14			2	3	0	0		9	0
Journal of Jewish Studies	0.0030	12			1	5	1	0		0	5
Jewish Biblical Quarterly	0.0030	13			3	4	0	0		1	5
Theological Studies	0.0029	7	32		1	2	3	0		0	1
Reformed Theological Review	0.0029	6			2	1	2	1		0	0
Science	0.0028	5			0	1	0	4		0	0
Bulletin of John Rylands Library	0.0026	8			0	6	2	0		0	0
Mishkan	0.0026	4			0	0	3	1		0	0
Philosophia Christi	0.0026	4			0	0	0	4		0	0
Journal of the American Academy of Religion	0.0026	8	33		1	1	2	0		2	2

Concordia Theological Quarterly	0.0025	5			1	0	0	3		0	1
Theologische Zeitschrift	0.0024	13			0	1	0	0		8	4
Church History	0.0023	6	30		1	3	2	0		0	0
Themelios	0.0023	6			1	3	2	0		0	0
Criswell Theological Review	0.0023	6	8		1	2	2	0		0	1
Studia Theologica	0.0022	9			0	3	1	0		3	2
Bible and Spade	0.0022	6			0	4	0	2		0	0
Bulletin for Biblical Research	0.0022	10			0	9	0	0		1	0
Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society	0.0022	10			2	0	0	0		6	2
Eretz-Israel	0.0022	12			0	1	0	0		1	10
Princeton Theological Review	0.0021	6			0	3	0	2		0	1
Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society	0.0020	6			6	0	0	0		0	0
Charisma	0.0020	3			0	0	3	0		0	0
Dialogue	0.0020	3	4		0	0	3	0		0	0
Faith and Philosophy	0.0020	5			0	3	0	2		0	0
Hebrew Studies	0.0020	11			0	0	0	0		3	8
Theology	0.0019	6			2	1	1	0		2	0
Levant	0.0019	10			0	4	0	0		0	6
Union Seminary Quarterly Review	0.0019	8	6		1	7	0	0		0	0
Reformation and Revival Journal	0.0018	4			1	0	1	1		0	1
Zeitschrift für Althebraistik	0.0018	10			0	0	0	0		4	6
Theology Today	0.0018	4	131		0	2	2	0		0	0
Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses	0.0017	9			0	1	0	0		6	2
Journal of Cuneiform Studies	0.0016	9			0	0	0	0		5	4
First Things	0.0015	3	35		0	1	2	0		0	0
Bulletin of the John Rylands Library	0.0015	6			0	0	0	1		0	5
Journal of African History	0.0015	3			0	0	2	0		0	1
Mennonite Quarterly Review	0.0015	3	20		0	0	2	0		0	1
Judaica	0.0015	3			0	0	0	2		0	1
Classical Quarterly	0.0015	6			2	1	0	0		2	1
Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute	0.0014	4			1	0	1	0		1	1
Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood	0.0013	6			0	6	0	0		0	0
Religious Studies	0.0013	4			0	3	0	1		0	0

Table 7

Number of Times Articles Were Accessed from these Journals from January 2008 – December 2009 in Corban College's *ATLASerials*.

Journal	Uses in ATLA
Christian Century	237
Interpretation	186
Bibliotheca Sacra	180
Catholic Biblical Quarterly	140
Theology Today	131
Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society	119
Review and Expositor	109
JSNT	101
Journal of Biblical Literature	69
Restoration Quarterly	55
Baptist History and Heritage	55
Word and World	52
Journal of Ecumenical Studies	49
Christianity Today	47
Tyndale Bulletin	41
Currents in Theology and Mission	41
Vetus Testamentum	40
Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion	40
Perspectives in Religious Studies	40
Master's Seminary Journal	38
International Review of Missions	37
Biblical Archaeologist	35
First Things	35
Journal of Theology for Southern Africa	34
Novum Testamentum	33
Journal of the American Academy of Religion	33
Theological Studies	32
Missiology	31
Church History	30
Calvin Theological Journal	29
Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling	29
Westminster Theological Journal	25
Harvard Theological Review	23
Semeia	20
Mennonite Quarterly Review	20
Didaskalia	17
Cross Currents	17

Presbyterion	15
Lutheran Quarterly	15
Zygon	13
Religious Studies Review	12
Modern Theology	12
Encounter	11
Hebrew Union College Annual	9
Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics	9
Reconstructionist	9
Criswell Theological Review	8
JSOT	7
Sociology of Religion	7
Ex Auditu	7
Union Seminary Quarterly Review	6
Journal of Religious Thought	6
Dialogue	4
Numen	3
Biblical Interpretation	2
Expository Times	1
Near Eastern Archaeology	1
Journal of Ritual Studies	1

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