

Luce Fellowship's quarter-century impact on the public square

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ATS undertook a three-phased research project in the 2019–20 academic year to assess the impact of the ATS Henry Luce III Fellows in Theology Program (Luce Fellowship) that ran from 1994 to 2018. The main methods adopted for the research were survey, document analysis, and interview.

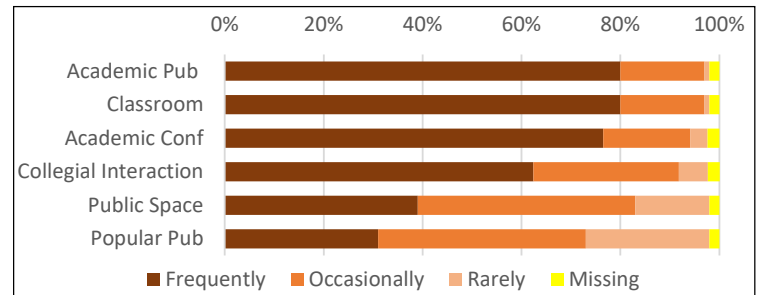
The 2019 Luce Survey was sent to 155 Luce fellows, and a total of 85 scholars completed the survey (55% response rate). For the interview phase, using stratified random sampling, 25 from the 85 participants who completed the survey were invited to participate in an online interview. This article discusses Fellows' Luce-related contributions in the broader public.

Drawing on Luce research in public spaces

Survey respondents were asked how often they draw on their Luce research in different venues. Figure 1 (above) shows that participants draw on their research frequently in academic publications (80% of respondents), classrooms (80%), academic conferences (77%), collegial interactions (62%), public spaces (39%), and popular publications (31%). While the percentages of the last two items are not as high as academic-specific items, at least 83% of respondents occasionally draw on their research in public spaces.



Figure 1: Frequency of Luce Fellows drawing on their own Luce research

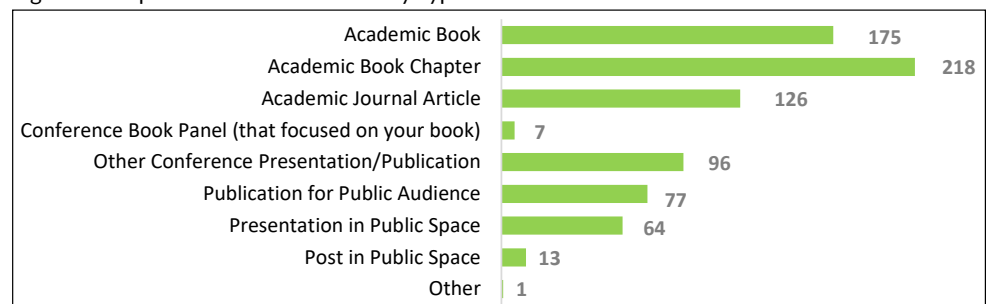


Document analysis: publication and product

Types of publication and product

To probe deeper into participants' engagement with broader publics through the publications and products that emerged during the Luce year, a total of 777 distinct items reported by 133 Fellows were analyzed. The items were gathered from two sources: the "2018 Bibliography in Progress" document that ATS updates yearly with publications from Luce Fellows and from the Luce Survey. See Figure 2 for full list.¹

Figure 2: Proportion of the 777 Items by Type of Publication and Product



¹ The actual number for the "Presentation in Public Space" and "Post in Public Space" items should be higher because Bibliography in Progress did not ask for these two items, and not all survey participants provided complete information on the survey.

Public engagement by category of research

As Figure 3 shows, research by the 133 fellows was sorted into seven broad categories. Figure 4 shows a comparison of Fellows' publications and products by research category. Scholars whose research focused on the modern-day implications of Christianity (e.g., Christianity and Contemporary Culture) produced proportionately more products that appeal to the public audience, than those whose research focused on what is traditionally classified as classical theology (e.g., Biblical Theology). Situating one's work within contemporary culture and having faith practitioners as the primary target audience could perhaps account for the difference.

Figure 3: Research Category of the 133 Luce Fellows



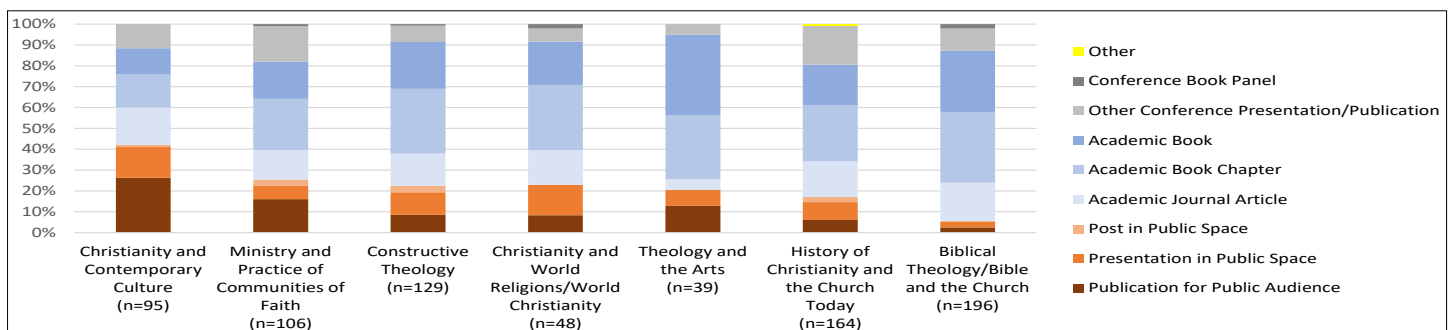
which she was writing. According to this participant, “To the extent the book succeeded, it was to the extent that I paid attention to what [my interlocuters] were trying to help me see that needed to be clarified.”

The Fellowship's vision to engage with the public sphere pushed another participant out of the academic spaces to which he was accustomed to connect with the broader audience. He partnered with an organization in producing a podcast program for more than half a year during the Luce year.

While a significant number of informants indicated that they have drawn on their Luce research in public spaces

very often, others have not been able to do so often. The obstacle to being more engaged publicly—according to a few respondents—was mainly that their research projects were too academic for the general audience. Still another participant reported having a hard time marketing the book to a general audience, although it was written for a non-academic, secular readership.

Figure 4: Publications and Products by Research Category



Other factors that have informed Fellows' public engagement

In addition to the nature of one's research, the interviews revealed factors that have also informed participants' public engagement. These include the Luce Fellowship's emphasis on the visibility of theological scholarship, Fellows' self-understanding as public intellectuals, publishers' efforts, and open doors that ensued. One participant went so far as to embed public engagement into her production process by lecturing about the material on

Venues of publication and product

The 77 items classified as “Publication for Public Audience” appeared in a total of 37 venues. The largest percentage (38%) were published in *The Christian Century*. Most of the other venues that participants used to appeal to the general audience were hosted by specific ecclesial families (e.g., *America*, *Christianity Today*, *Commonweal*), and theological institutions (e.g., *Crux*, *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*). However, a number of participants also

contributed in journals with a specialized focus such as that on preaching (e.g., *Journal for Preachers*), ecology (e.g., *The Ecozoic Reader*), and intentional communities (e.g., *Communities: Journal of Cooperative Living*).

Of the 64 items in “Presentation in Public Space” (46 venues), about half were public lectures given at colleges or universities, whereas about 16% were presentations given at faith communities.

About a dozen entries notably involved interviews on podcast, radio, and television broadcasting that featured Fellows’ works or drew on their research. Lastly, of the 13 items in “Post in Public Space” (9 venues), participants’ contributions appeared in such venues as Australian Broadcasting Corporation, CNN, Religion and Ethics Newsweekly (PBS), *The Huffington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*. A few scholars also engaged in blog exchange.

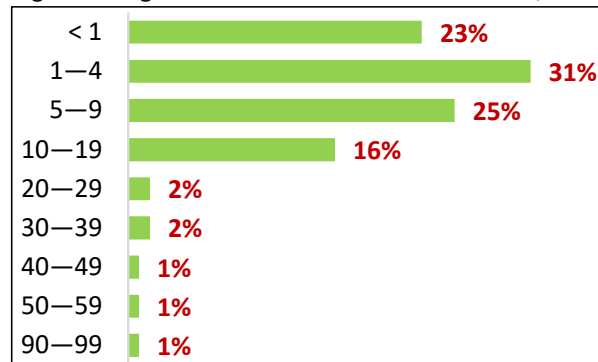
There were a few cases where participants’ work drew the attention of the secular public or mainstream media, though gaining credibility with people outside the theological realm does not appear to have been a common experience for Luce Fellows.

Document analysis: citation

This research conducted citation analysis on Google Scholar through the Publish or Perish (PoP) software. PoP is a software program that works in conjunction with a variety of data sources (e.g., Microsoft Academic Search, Web of Science) to retrieve and analyze academic citations. Of the 777 items from the 133 participants, PoP-Google Scholar yielded results for a total of 388 items from 120 participants.²

Figure 5 (above) shows that 23% of the 120 scholars’ most-cited works were referenced less than once per year throughout the products’ lifespans; 31%, 1-4 times/year; 25%, 5-9 times/year; 16%, 10-19 times/year. A further 7% were cited more than 20 times/year.

Figure 5: Highest Number of Citations Per Year (N=120 Works)



Works cited more than 20 times/year are within the “Biblical Theology/Bible and the Church,” “Constructive Theology,” and “Theology and the Art” research categories (see Figure 3 for list of categories). Most notably, several works in Constructive Theology were exceptionally well-referenced (i.e., 30–39 times/year, 40–49 times/year, 50–59 times/year). Biblical Theology/Bible and the Church has the work that was cited 90–99 times/year.

We can conclude with a measure of confidence that when a work is well-cited, it is likely that the scholar has made a significant impact upon the field. At the same time, we cannot conclude with equal confidence that the reverse is true.

Luce Fellowship’s broader impact

Though it was not the Fellowship’s primary goal that participants would hone their teaching skills during their Luce years, a substantial number of informants reported that their Luce research, in varying degrees, informed their subsequent teaching or pedagogy.

A participant stated that her Luce research has given her legitimacy as she engages in ongoing community-wide conversations regarding certain social justice issues. As one of the key institutional leaders, she has been able to

² Anne-Wil Harzing, “Publish or Perish,” harzing.com, <https://harzing.com/resources/publish-or-perish> (accessed Jan. 20, 2020).

initiate necessary changes from her position from within. For her, “the scholarly project also bears out in terms of the direction of theological institutions.”

Another participant revealed that he is currently involved in an institution-wide project that is interdisciplinary by nature, and the project is connected with his Luce research.

Still another informant reported that as she shared her research findings with the community of color of which she is a part, she observed that sharing the project’s findings has given the community a greater sense of agency.

In addition to the self-perception of participants, the Fellowship has also contributed to the scholarly identity at several smaller institutions, in particular. A handful of participants from these schools remarked that it was a “big

deal” for their schools that a faculty member received the Luce grant.

Remarking on the conclusion of the Fellowship, a participant stated, “I know how much valuable scholarship that has been produced and how important it has been for people in fields that otherwise had inadequate access to resources.” She hoped that one of the outcomes of this study would be “a renewed sense for the Foundation of what an important project this was and perhaps to develop something that will be its successor.”

Conclusion

Through sponsoring innovative research and inspiring scholars to engage with the broader public, the Luce Fellowship has carved out a key space for this new normative practice within theological education.



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