

# Report on Survey of Researchers Who Study the Amish and Related Groups

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## Survey Design and Objectives

The purpose of this project is to better understand the information needs of researchers who study the Amish and related groups. The results will inform the collection and cataloging of Amish-related materials in Elizabethtown College's Hess Archives and Special Collections. The study was based on related research on information-seeking behavior, including Margaret Stieg Dalton and Laurie Charnigo, "Historians and Their Information Sources," *College and Research Libraries* 65, no. 5 (2004): 400–417. The questions were written by Rachel Grove Rohrbaugh, archivist, in consultation with Sarah Penniman, library director, and Steven Nolt, director of the Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies and senior scholar. The survey questions are included in the appendix.

## IRB

Before distributing the survey, we applied to the Elizabethtown College Institutional Review Board for an exempt review. We submitted the application on May 26, 2022, and it was approved on May 27.

## Distribution

An invitation to take the survey was shared with the attendees of the Young Center's 2022 Amish conference (126 email addresses) as well as those who subscribe to the *Journal of Plain Anabaptist Communities (JPAC)* listserv. We also sent the invitation to the Young Center's general events email list (288 email addresses), but the Young Center noted that few on this list do research. The invitation was sent individually to libraries, archives, and museums with Amish-related collections (22 email addresses), and a link was added to the carousel on the High Library homepage and the Hess Archives webpage. The survey was open from June 13 to August 15, 2022. There were 54 responses.

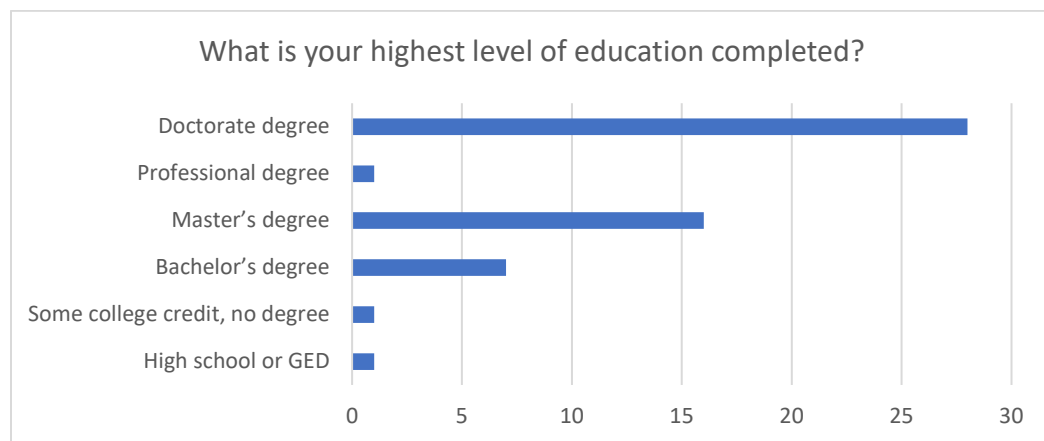
## Results

### *Demographics*

Over half of our respondents ( $n = 28$ , 52%) reported their highest level of education is a doctorate. The second highest number reported was a master's degree ( $n = 16$ , 30%) followed by a bachelor's



degree ( $n = 7$ , 13%). We had just one respondent each for the remaining three categories (professional degree, some college, and high school/GED).



Just over 31% of the respondents ( $n = 17$ ) reported living in Pennsylvania. The following Pennsylvania counties were noted: Allegheny ( $n = 2$ ), Berks ( $n = 2$ ), Centre ( $n = 1$ ), Chester ( $n = 1$ ), Cumberland ( $n = 1$ ), Franklin ( $n = 1$ ), Lancaster ( $n = 4$ ), Lawrence ( $n = 1$ ), Lebanon ( $n = 1$ ), Mifflin ( $n = 1$ ), Philadelphia ( $n = 1$ ), and York ( $n = 1$ ). After Pennsylvania, the highest number of respondents were from Ohio ( $n = 5$ ). The remaining U.S. states are represented in Table 1. One respondent reported being from the U.S. but did not list a city or state.

**Table 1**

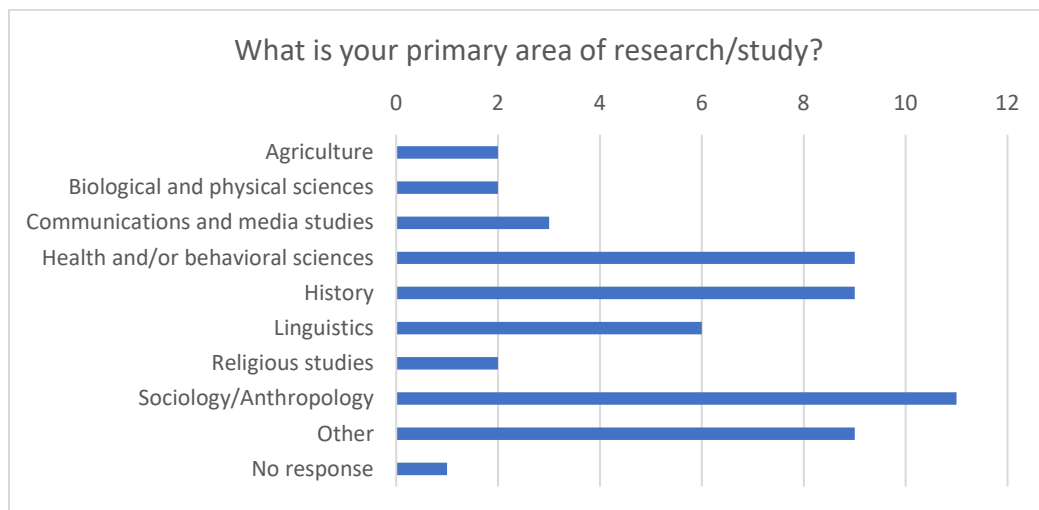
*Number of Respondents by State*

State	<i>n</i>
Pennsylvania	17
Ohio	5
Indiana	3
Michigan	2
Missouri	2
New York	2
North Carolina	2
Virginia	2
West Virginia	2
Wisconsin	2
Iowa	1
Kentucky	1
Maryland	1
South Carolina	1

An additional nine respondents reported living in other countries including Finland ( $n = 1$ ), Germany ( $n = 3$ ), Israel ( $n = 1$ ), Sweden ( $n = 1$ ), and Switzerland ( $n = 3$ ).

### ***Research Focus/Purpose***

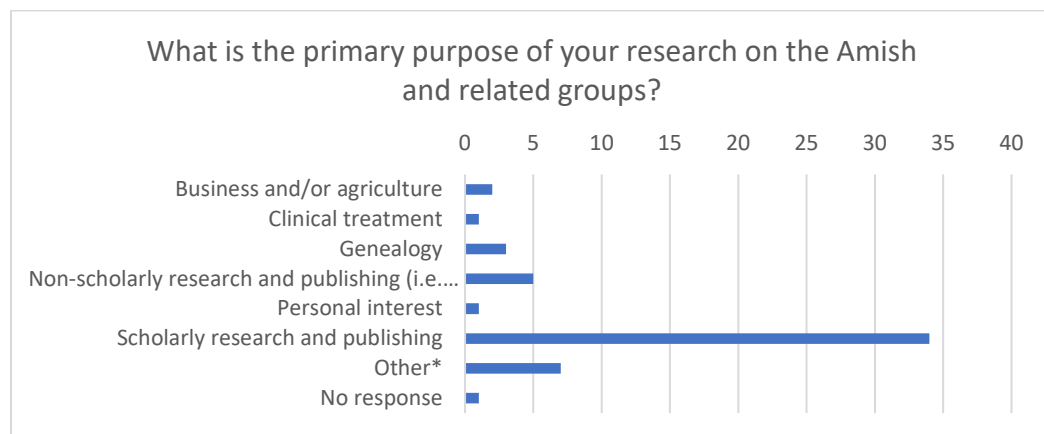
The largest number of respondents ( $n = 11$ , 20%) reported sociology/anthropology as their primary area of research/study. This was followed by health and/or behavioral sciences and history (both  $n = 9$ , 17%), linguistics ( $n = 6$ , 11%), and communications and media studies ( $n = 3$ , 5%). Agriculture, biological and physical sciences, and religious studies each had two responses, and one survey taker did not respond to this question.



An additional nine respondents (17%) marked “Other” for this question. Their responses are below:

- “Education, culture, Amish textbooks, mortality rates, accident rates”
- “Change among plain groups, legal issues”
- “Law”
- “I am not a typical researcher, more of a program development professional.”
- “Statistical exploration”
- “Demographic studies of the Amish”
- “Ag Safety and Health”
- “Literature and Film”
- “Provide library service to researchers in any/all fields of study”

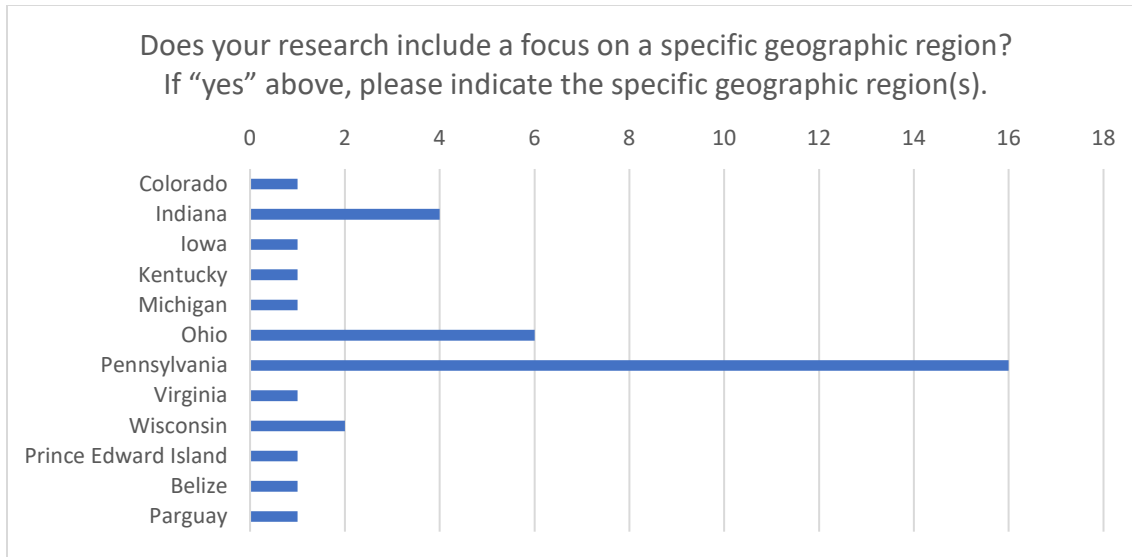
We also asked respondents the primary purpose of their research.



The majority ( $n = 34$ , 63%) reported that their primary purpose was “scholarly research and publishing.” Smaller numbers reported “non-scholarly research and publishing (i.e., popular books and websites)” ( $n = 5$ ), “genealogy” ( $n = 3$ ), “business and/or agriculture” ( $n = 2$ ), clinical treatment ( $n = 1$ ), and “personal interest” ( $n = 1$ ). One survey taker did not respond to this question, and an additional seven respondents reported “other.” Their responses are below:

- “Disease discovery and clinical treatment”
- “Genealogy; Local history and genealogical publications; Personal interest”
- “Education and advocacy”
- “Amish interaction with the law”
- “Enhance safety and health”
- “Provide library service to researchers in any/all fields of study”
- “I am a Child Welfare social worker and there is a large population of Amish in Seneca County”

We also asked respondents, “Does your research include a focus on a specific geographic region?” Thirty-three responded “yes” (61%) and 21 responded “no” (39%). Of those that responded “yes,” 48% ( $n = 16$ ) named Pennsylvania or a place in Pennsylvania. This includes two respondents who mentioned Pennsylvania along with other place(s): “Pennsylvania and Ohio” and “Lancaster County, Prince Edward Island, Colorado.” Nine of the 16 (56%) mentioned Lancaster or Lancaster County, one Lawrence County, one Mifflin County, and one “Western Pennsylvania.” After Pennsylvania, the place most frequently mentioned was Holmes County, Ohio ( $n = 4$ ). One survey taker who responded “no” to the question about focus on a specific geographic region put in the comments that they “tend to focus on the Wayne/Holmes Ohio settlement but not exclusively.” Other places mentioned included Indiana ( $n = 4$ ), Wisconsin ( $n = 2$ ), Virginia ( $n = 1$ ), Kentucky ( $n = 1$ ), Michigan ( $n = 1$ ), Belize ( $n = 1$ ), Paraguay ( $n = 1$ ), and “Mid-Atlantic region, USA” ( $n = 1$ ).



*Note.* Responses that mentioned more than one place are counted under every place mentioned. The “no” respondent who mentioned Ohio in their comments is also counted.

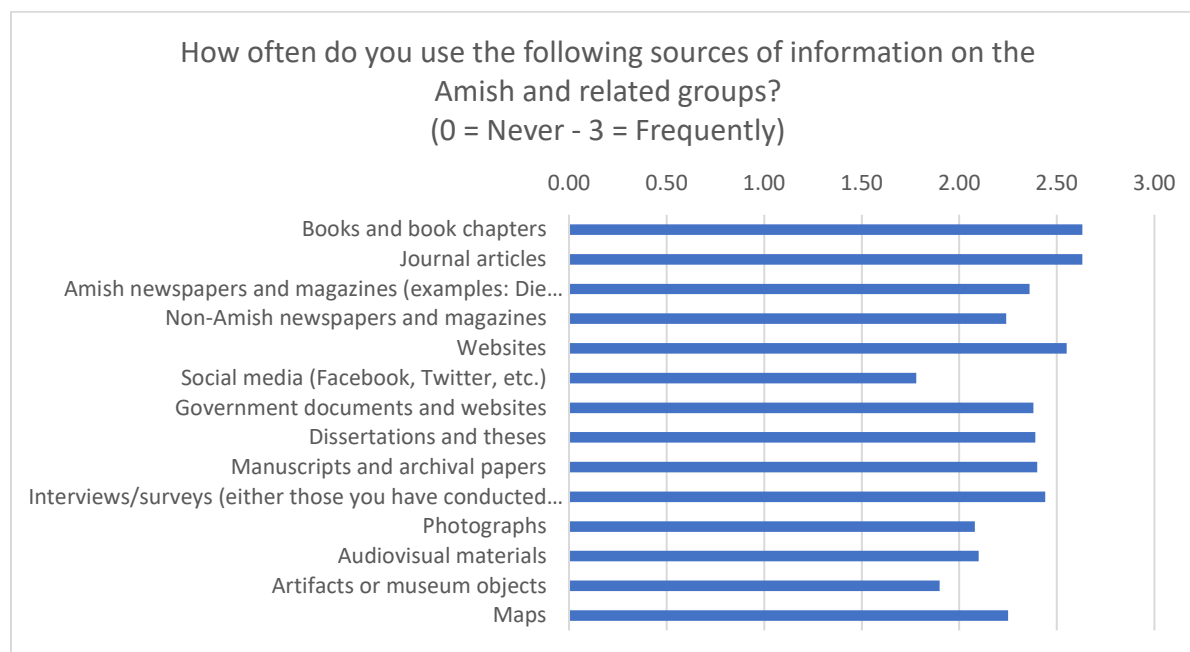
We also asked survey takers, “If your research focus is a Plain Anabaptist group other than the Amish, what is that group?” Twenty of the 54 respondents (37%) indicated interest in a group other than the Amish. Most commonly mentioned were conservative or Old Order Mennonite groups, with just a few mentions of Church of the Brethren, German Baptist Brethren, or other Anabaptist groups. The full list of answers is included below.

- “Also recently starting to include old order Mennonites and other anabaptist groups in our studies”
- “Amish and conservative Mennonite women”
- “Amish and Old Order Mennonites”
- “Amish, but also Weaverland, Groffdale, and conservative Mennonite”
- “Anabaptist/Mennonite”
- “Any Old Order group”
- “Beachy Amish”
- “Both Amish and Mennonite”
- “[Amish], but we include old order Mennonite”
- “Church of the Brethren”
- “Church of the Brethren/German Baptist Brethren/Dunkers; Brethren in Christ/River Brethren; German Seventh Day Baptists/Ephrata Cloister, etc.”
- “I mostly focus on OO Amish, I have done some work that involved other Plain people but no group in particular”
- “Mennonite with Amish roots”
- “Mennonites”

- “Mennonites, Kleine Gemeinde, Old Colony, EMMC and Old Order Mennonites, Hoover Church”
- “Old German Baptist Brethren”
- “Old Order Mennonite” (two responses)
- “other conservative horse-and-buggy Anabaptist groups”
- “Russian Mennonites”

### ***Information Resources***

A large portion of the survey focused on how often respondents used a variety of research resources.



For each resource, 49–54 survey takers responded. In the chart above, “never” responses were coded as zero, “rarely” as one, “sometimes” as two, and “frequently” as three. We then determined the average frequency score for each resource. In Table 2, they are displayed in order of reported frequency of use. With the exception of “artifacts or museum objects” and “social media,” every resource scored above a 2 (i.e., “sometimes”).

**Table 2**  
*Average Frequency of Resource Use*

Resource	Average frequency
Books and book chapters	2.63
Journal articles	2.63
Websites	2.55
Interviews/surveys (either those you have conducted or those conducted by other scholars)	2.44
Manuscripts and archival papers	2.40
Dissertations and theses	2.39
Government documents and websites	2.38
Amish newspapers and magazines (examples: <i>Die Botschaft</i> , <i>Family Life</i> )	2.36
Maps	2.25
Non-Amish newspapers and magazines	2.24
Audiovisual materials	2.10
Photographs	2.08
Artifacts or museum objects	1.90
Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	1.78

The remaining questions in the survey were all open-ended, and we had anywhere from 22–39 responses to each question.

In the answers to question 11, “Please list any other materials you consider to be important for your research on the Amish and related groups,” the most frequently mentioned resources were Amish directories (i.e., books listing the names, addresses, et cetera, of each family in a settlement or region) with six responses. Other resources mentioned more than once included correspondence and casual conversations with Amish individuals; materials used in Amish schools; sound/audio recordings; and genealogies/genealogical databases, including the Anabaptist Genealogy Database (AGDB). Respondents also mentioned the following (with some occasional overlap with the resources outlined in question 10): “hospital admissions related to Amish,” church publications, courthouse documents, ethnographic interviews, “materials/documents that are in ownership with Amish families,” “journals focused on plain people,” professional conferences, specific publication like *The Diary* and *Blackboard Bulletin*, and “tools regarding how to help communicate with Amish around child safety and well-being.”

Questions 12 and 13 addressed access to resources. Question 12 asked, “What sources of information on the Amish and related groups would you like to see more readily available?” and question 13 asked, “What sources of information on the Amish and related groups would you like to see digitized and available online?” There was a fair bit of overlap in the answers to these two questions.

The most frequent answers for both question 12 and 13 were Amish books and periodicals. *The Diary*, *Blackboard Bulletin*, *The Budget*, *Die Botschaft*, *Family Life*, and *Plain Interests* were specifically mentioned. Five of the respondents to question 12 (14%) and 14 of the respondents to question 13 (36%) mentioned wanting better access and/or online access to these resources. Other frequently mentioned resources in the responses for questions 12 and 13 were directories, phone numbers, and/or address books for Amish communities (9 total responses); bibliographies and/or collections of academic articles (both new and back-file, 6 total responses); census information and/or population statistics (4 total responses); genealogy resources (4 total responses); digitized historical documents (3 total responses); mortality and/or health records (not individually identifiable, 3 total responses); Amish settlement data and histories (3 total responses); photographs (2 total responses); and private collections of letters and diaries (2 total responses). Other resources mentioned by at least one respondent included information on Amish financial issues including mutual aid; Steering Committee activities and histories; “frequency of injuries while engaged in farming;” diversity and inter-group differences; notifications of new books; “changes in religious and occupational focus;” materials from past Young Center and other conferences; “more extensive runs of all church publications;” “collections of denominational and related archives/manuscript collections;” and “more interview transcriptions (both in English and Pennsylvania Dutch).” One respondent also mentioned wanting to see digitized versions of “Brethren materials—periodicals (*Vindicator*); hymnbooks and songbooks.”

The final question of the survey asked, “Is there anything else you would like to share about your information needs when researching the Amish and related groups?” Excluding responses such as “no” or “thank you!” there were 15 responses to this question. They are listed below.

- “Because I’m not a student currently or an instructor, some college-based online archives are closed to me. I’d like to know how to access them.”
- “Generally, we collect local births, marriages, obituaries for the Mifflin County Amish & Mennonite Historical Society.”
- “I am able to find and access, sometimes via my College’s Interlibrary Loan system, the resources that I need”
- “I appreciate, value, and use the work of demographers, like Edsel [Burdge], Joe [Donnermeyer], and others who presented at the [Young Center Amish] conference. I wish there was a way to better connect those of us doing social service research—more collaboration on projects, more networking, more sharing of challenges and results. I have unmet technology needs like qualitative software (MAXQDA) and transcription services.”
- “I would like to be able to easily access up-to-date data like birth rates, deaths from COVID but probably too specific for the library to collect.”
- “I’m always on board for more linguistic resources. In particular on different varieties of Pennsylvania Dutch and the English spoken by Pennsylvania Dutch speakers.”



- “It has been challenging to obtain grant funding and support so ways to navigate those challenges with others would be much appreciated—have been wondering if I should focus on other subjects because of it.”
- “It is very interesting research and is highly relevant to the study of American culture.”
- “It would be great to have a central place that collects images on the Amish. At least I don’t know of this if there is a place.”
- “More information on specific differences between various Amish groups and other plain Anabaptist groups, given the huge diversity found within these groups (with the caveat that so much of these differences not readily seen, but are nonetheless different)”
- “More ways to interact with the communities.”
- “Most private college and university special collections and denominational historical societies, etc. need much better online finding aids and descriptions of their holdings.”
- “Question 5 is biased. The field of cultural studies websites, social media, and popular literature. It is scholarly research.”
- “[The Young Center Amish] conference was extremely relevant to my work and I will be sharing my experience with coworkers during an in-service.”
- “We appreciate/rely frequently on the statistical demographic information compiled/made available by Young Center”

## **Takeaways**

### ***Diversity***

While the majority of our respondents were similar (doctorate-holding individuals focused on scholarly research and publishing, typically about the Old Order Amish and usually in Pennsylvania), the diversity of responses showed the wide-ranging interest in this field. At least 14 different disciplines were represented in the question about primary area of research/study, and when asked about a focus on a specific geographic region, 12 different states or countries were mentioned and within that at least six specific counties or regions. The researchers themselves come from states throughout the U.S. and five foreign countries.

### ***Sources and Access to Materials***

The average respondent reported using 12 of the 14 resource types listed on the survey at least sometimes. With that in mind, all of these material types should still be considered as potential additions to the Hess Archives, High Library, and Young Center collections. Given their lower overall reported usage, collecting artifacts or museum objects and social media should likely be a lower priority.

The answers to the open-ended questions at the end of the survey are a rich source of information on the types of materials that researchers value and would like to see online. Within

the boundaries of copyright and privacy concerns, we should prioritize access to (and perhaps digitization of) Amish periodicals and directories.

### **Limitations**

Materials on the Amish and related groups are regularly used by undergraduate classes at Elizabethtown College. Due to the way this survey was distributed (mainly through professional and Young Center lists), students who make use of these resources were not represented in the survey results. For the same reason, we saw few responses from other people who are not professional researchers but may have interest in these types of materials.

### **Appendix**

#### **Survey of Researchers Who Study the Amish and Related Groups**

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Rachel Grove Rohrbaugh, Archivist at Elizabethtown College. The purpose of this project is to better understand the information needs of researchers who study the Amish and related Plain Anabaptist groups. The results will inform the collection and cataloging of materials in Elizabethtown College's [Hess Archives and Special Collections](#).

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete an anonymous web-based survey. The survey should take no more than 10 minutes. The survey will not collect any identifiable information and no one will be able to connect your responses to you. Your anonymity is further protected by not asking you to sign and return a consent form. Your completion of the survey will serve as your consent. Participation is voluntary, and you may discontinue participation at any time.

If you have any questions about this study, you may e-mail me at [grover@etown.edu](mailto:grover@etown.edu). This project has been reviewed and approved by the Elizabethtown College Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the [Elizabethtown College IRB](#).

1. What is your highest level of education completed?
  - No schooling completed
  - Eighth grade
  - High school or GED
  - Some college credit, no degree
  - Trade/technical/vocational training
  - Associate degree
  - Bachelor's degree
  - Master's degree
  - Professional degree
  - Doctorate degree

2. Where do you live?  
County (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_  
State (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_  
Country: \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your primary area of research/study?
  - Health and/or behavioral sciences
  - History
  - Sociology/Anthropology
  - Linguistics
  - Religious studies
  - Political science
  - Fine and performing arts
  - Biological and physical sciences
  - Business
  - Agriculture
  - Communications and media studies
  - Other\*
4. \*If “other,” please indicate your primary area of research/study below.
5. What is the primary purpose of your research on the Amish and related groups?
  - Scholarly research and publishing
  - Non-scholarly research and publishing (i.e. popular books and websites)
  - Journalism (i.e. writing for newspapers and magazines)
  - Clinical treatment
  - Genealogy
  - Business and/or agriculture
  - Legislative/municipal interest
  - Personal interest
  - Other\*
6. \*If “other,” please indicate the primary purpose of your research below.
7. Does your research include a focus on a specific geographic region?  
Yes\*  
No
8. \*If “yes,” please indicate the specific geographic region(s).

9. If your research focus is a Plain Anabaptist group other than the Amish, what is that group? [open-ended]
10. How often do you use the following sources of information on the Amish and related groups?  
Frequently, Sometimes, Rarely, Never
- Books and book chapters
  - Journal articles
  - Amish newspapers and magazines (examples: *Die Botschaft*, *Family Life*, etc.)
  - Non-Amish newspapers and magazines
  - Websites
  - Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
  - Government documents and websites
  - Dissertations and theses
  - Manuscripts and archival papers
  - Interviews/surveys (either those you have conducted or those conducted by other scholars)
  - Photographs
  - Audiovisual materials
  - Artifacts or museum objects
  - Maps
11. Please list any other materials you consider to be important for your research on the Amish and related groups. [open-ended]
12. What sources of information on the Amish and related groups would you like to see more readily available? [open-ended]
13. What sources of information on the Amish and related groups would you like to see digitized and available online? [open-ended]
14. Is there anything else you would like to share about your information needs when researching the Amish and related groups? [open-ended]