

Final Assessment Report

Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP) Review
Religious Studies Undergraduate Program

Date of Review: March 22 - 23, 2012

Review Team Members: Dr. Carol B. Duncan, Wilfrid Laurier University
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Summary:

The Reviewers highlighted that the Religious Studies Department is delivering a high quality undergraduate program largely because the faculty are excellent teachers and researchers. Long renowned, nationally and internationally, for its excellent graduate programs (MA and PhD), the undergraduate program has also produced many strong graduates who have gone on to distinguished graduate studies and academic careers in Canada and internationally. The Reviewers stated that the department is among the best, not only in Canada, but also in North America and attracts the interest and attention of both students and scholars. The program offerings provide both breadth of coverage in Eastern and Western religious traditions as well as comparative and social scientific approaches to the study of religion. The Review Committee was particularly struck by the consistent message from faculty, staff and students regarding the department's high level of commitment to student engagement and student learning. The Reviewers noted that in keeping with President Patrick Deane's message, "Forward with Integrity", students in Religious Studies are fortunate to have faculty and staff who pay attention to their "unique circumstances" and respect their process of learning.

The Reviewers offered some recommendations for improvements to the program which included enacting an intentional curricular renewal, including rethinking the four fields of study and their interaction, redistributing faculty responsibility for large and small classes, introducing prerequisites for third and fourth year classes, possibly designating world religions as a mandatory class for program students, and developing a systematic, collective process for the deletion of infrequently taught courses, the renaming and updating of older courses and their descriptions, and the introduction of new courses. The Reviewers also suggested raising the profile of the undergraduate program.

The Quality Assurance Committee completed a review of the report of the department of Religious Studies undergraduate program as part of the IQAP process. The reviewers concluded that this is a fundamentally sound department that needs to refurbish its curriculum and to strive for a higher profile within and without the university community. The department has signaled its intention to move in these directions with the support of the Faculty of Social Sciences. We recommend that a review be held of the program in four years to ascertain the progress made in these directions.

Recommendation	Implementation Plan
<p>Raise the profile of the undergraduate program by utilizing various channels of publicity including print communications, ongoing web-based information, and face-to-face interactions with students</p>	<p>Continue to keep website content up-to-date and the design user-friendly. Continue to explore the use of social media to communicate with program students and the larger university community. We have been diligent in channeling stories on our undergraduate program towards the Faculty of Social Sciences website and newsletter, and we now look forward to working closely with the Faculty's newly-appointed Communications Assistant.</p>
<p>Enact intentional curricular review and renewal</p>	<p>The Department plans a retreat devoted to the undergraduate program for April or May 2013 where a serious and focussed discussion of curricular renewal will take place.</p>
<p>Restructure recruitment and retention - develop faculty-based advising program - regular advertising in introductory courses - web-based advertisements of the program and specific courses</p>	<p>New teaching-track appointment will play a leading role in the Departmental advising of undergraduates. The Department will be more diligent in advertising the program in their own courses. A flowchart of required courses for the program will be included on the website.</p>
<p>Reschedule classes so that not all mandatory and fourth-year seminars are taught at night</p>	<p>Aim to be more flexible in scheduling and to work with the Registrar's Office to ensure that less night courses are scheduled.</p>
<p>Develop new visions for leadership of the Jewish Studies minor</p>	<p>Department will develop such new visions to the extent that existing resources allow. Department has already implemented changes to the structure of the Jewish Studies committee so that it focuses more on the Jewish Studies minor.</p>
<p>Consider the possibilities and challenges offered by community engagement</p>	<p>Explore opportunities for community engagement to be discussed at Departmental retreat.</p>
<p>Establish procedures for Program students to meet with a faculty advisor to review course choices and plan ahead for further study</p>	<p>Department will investigate how best to establish such procedures.</p>
<p>Recommended that the Department be consulted for input on faculty wide plans about teaching effective writing</p>	<p>The Faculty office is developing a new system of writing workshops and supports for undergraduates and will engage Religious Studies faculty in this initiative</p>