

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Comparative Religion Program Performance Review

Dean's Summary Report and
Recommendations

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December 1, 2011

**Dean's Summary Report and Recommendations
Program Performance Review for the
Comparative Religion Department**

B.A. in Religious Studies

**Minors in Christian Studies,
Islamic Studies, Jewish Studies, and Religious Studies**

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During the 2010-11 academic year, the Department of Comparative Religion, under the leadership of Dr. Paul Levesque, Department Chair, engaged in the program performance review process by conducting a self-study that is summarized in the enclosed report. In February, 2011, two external reviewers, Dr. Jon Stone from CSU Long Beach and Dr. Vivian-Lee Nyitray from UC Riverside, and one on-campus reviewer, Dr. Leila Zenderland from the CSUF American Studies Department, conducted a day long site visit. After reviewing the program's self-study report and interviewing the department chair, faculty members, the college dean, students and others, the reviewers prepared a joint report.

To provide a context for this summary and recommendations, a 7-year history of the department's enrollments and other benchmark statistics are provided below:

Year	FTEs: Target	FTEs: Actual	% Target	FTEF Alloca- tion	Budgeted SFR	Achieved SFR
2004-2005	143	144.8	101.3%	6.3	23.0	23.0
2005-2006	151	140.1	92.8%	6.4	23.6	21.9
2006-2007	153	134.5	87.9%	6.5	23.5	20.7
2007-2008	144	135.8	94.3%	6.0	24.0	23.9
2008-2009	136.3	138.8	101.8%	5.6	24.0	24.8
2009-2010	145	156.6	108.0%	5.6	24.0	28.0
2010-2011	161.6	173.4	126.2%	5.5	25.0	31.5

The department has enjoyed growing enrollments, meeting or exceeding target in four of the seven years under review. Throughout this period the enrollments for Comparative Religion grew by 19%, while the College grew in FTEs by almost 9%.

It should be noted that the FTEF allocation for the 2011-2012 increased to 7.0. Despite the increasing enrollments, the FTEF allocation has remained fairly stable; this has resulted in an increasing effective SFR over the past few years that exceeds the College budget SFR of 25.

The department of Comparative Religion offers the bachelor's degree in Religious Studies. The table below summarizes the number of students declared as majors, the number of degrees awarded and the number of students declaring each of the minors offered by the department.

Year	Majors AY Headcount*		# of Degrees Awarded to Primary Majors	# of Degrees Awarded to 2 nd Majors	Minors AY Headcount*			
	1st	2nd			Religious Studies	Christian Studies	Islamic Studies	Jewish Studies
2004-2005	34.5	0.0	11	0	13.5	7.5		0.0
2005-2006	31.5	2.0	16	0	10.0	8.5		2.0
2006-2007	32.5	5.0	11	2	10.5	9.5		1.0
2007-2008	44.5	7.0	12	2	7.0	5.0		1.5
2008-2009	47.0	5.5	23	3	6.5	4.0		2.0
2009-2010	40.5	4.5	19	3	7.0	6.5	0.0	0.5
2010-2011	25.5	9.0	Not Available	Not Available	9.5	3.5	1.5	1.0

*Source: IRAS website; annualized number of majors and minors

The number of students declaring a Religious Studies major generally increased through the review period to a peak of 47 in 2008-09; however the number of majors was at its lowest with 25.5 in 2010-11. This sudden drop may be due to the large number of graduates in the previous two years. The number of students declaring a minor in one of the four minors offered by the department has declined through the years. This may be related to the corresponding increase in majors in that more students may elect to complete the baccalaureate degree rather than the minor. The Islamic Studies minor was approved in 2009 and so far one student has completed it. Very few students have availed themselves of the Jewish Studies minor through the period under review.

Department Mission, Goals and Environment

At the time of the last Program Performance Review, the department did not have a mission statement or articulated goals. Since then, the faculty have developed an excellent mission statement accompanied by four goals:

Mission Statement:

To describe and interpret the developments, worldviews, and practices of religious traditions in a non-sectarian, academic manner for the benefit of students, faculty from other fields, and the greater Orange County community.

Goals:

1. To offer classes in the world's religions within the General Education framework and for majors and minors;
2. To teach in a scholarly and non-sectarian manner;
3. To conduct scholarly research that contributes to an understanding of the varieties of religious thought and experience;
4. To investigate in a scholarly manner the impact of the varieties of religious thought and experience on contemporary society.

The self study describes how the department mission and the corresponding goals align well with the University mission and goals. The department faculty are committed to the "the preeminence of learning" and strive to achieve this by setting high standards in their classes. The discipline of comparative religion provides an especially important context for the development of critical thinking skills. The content of the courses offered by this department is of critical importance given the international current events and the political influence of religion in American politics. The degree offered in Religious Studies continues to maintain its significance and relevance, educating students who are knowledgeable in the field and who graduate with skills in analysis, oral and written communication, and information literacy.

Program Description and Analysis

Program Changes

The faculty have done a good job keeping the curriculum current, relevant and engaging. Several new courses have been added, and others have been revised and updated. This has resulted in a curriculum that covers the wide range of religious traditions, including sub-branches within religions that in years past were functionally ignored. The examination of the influences of religion on global events, culture, and national politics provides students in this program with skills and insights that enhance their understanding of the world we live in and facilitates civic engagement on multiple levels.

The Islamic Studies minor is an important new addition to the curriculum since the last Program Performance Review. Approved in 2009, this new minor parallels the existing minors in Christian Studies, Jewish Studies and Religious Studies.

Degree Structure

The Religious Studies degree program requirements are well organized. The lower division requirements (9 units) introduce students to the study of religion in general and to Western and Non-Western religious traditions. The upper division requirements (27 units) include a methods course and senior seminar in addition to two classes in each of the following categories: Western religious thought, Non-Western religious thought, and experiences in religion. Finally, all students in this major complete at least one course in

textual studies. The organization of the degree program requirements allows students excellent choices while ensuring that each graduate will have a well-rounded education in the field.

Demand and Enrollment Trends

The courses offered by this department are in good demand. Although there were three years in a row (2005-06 through 2007-08) when the department enrollments fell significantly below the enrollment targets, the department has met or exceeded its target for the last 3 years of the review period. In fall 2011, the department achieved 116% of its enrollment target and there is every indication it will meet its 2011-12 AY target once the spring numbers are in. The course schedule is managed with expertise.

Documentation of Student Academic Achievement and Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

The Department of Comparative Religion is to be commended for its progress and accomplishments in the area of assessment. At the time of the last Program Performance Review, the department did not have well-defined Student Learning Outcomes and its sole assessment tool was an indirect measure in the form of an exit survey. Currently, there are articulated goals and learning outcomes that are communicated to students in multiple ways: the catalog, the department website, and on class syllabi; the faculty have developed a curriculum map that informs them which classes address which goals; finally, the faculty have begun collecting data and have designed a schedule for direct assessment of each goal/outcome. These accomplishments represent great strides in the area of assessment.

Faculty

Of the five tenured/tenure track faculty in the department there are three full professors, one associate and one assistant professor. (Since the time of the Program Performance Review site visit, one professor's appointment changed from .5 in Comparative Religion and .5 in Liberal Studies to 1.0 in Comparative Religion.) Given the FTEF allocation of 7.0 in academic year 2011-12, 71% of the FTEF allocation is filled. Another hire would take them to 86%. Per the self study, the department is committed to the teaching of the five major world religions, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. Currently, the full-time tenured track faculty have expertise in all but Judaism because of the recent retirement of their Jewish Studies expert. Despite the current economic environment, I support the department's plan to search for a tenure-track hire in 2012-2013.

Reviewers' Report

The joint report submitted by the reviewers is full of praise for this department. They note that the department has grown in a variety of ways since the last Program Performance Review: The number of majors and minors has increased; the faculty and curriculum have become more diverse; and, the assessment program has become more sophisticated and focused. The reviewers affirm and agree with the direction the department has mapped out with its short- and long-term goals. It should be noted that the reviewers were adamant that the department fill the gap left by the retirement of Dr. Benjamin Hubbard

so that the academic offerings in Jewish Studies remain strong. The reviewers agreed with the faculty that the goal of increasing the number of majors and minors is an important one. They offered three suggestions for strategies to achieve this goal: 1) Cultivate an alumni network through a department newsletter; 2) advertise the Religious Studies major as an excellent second major; 3) charter a chapter of Theta Alpha Kappa, the National Honor Society for Religious Studies and Theology.

Dean's Recommendations

The faculty in the Department of Comparative Religion are to be commended for their accomplishments since the last Program Performance Review. Clearly, this is a healthy and thriving department with excellent leadership and dedicated members. I am in full agreement with the thoughtful and achievable long term goals as outlined in the self-study, including plans to conduct a search for a professor of Jewish Studies. I recommend that the faculty revisit these goals with an eye toward prioritization and toward establishing feasible timelines for accomplishing these goals. I would like to meet with the chair and review the timelines established by the faculty before the end of the spring 2012 term.