

Program Performance Review: Culmination Meeting Memo Religious Studies, BA

The 2018-2019 Program Performance Review (PPR) process for Religious Studies, BA program concluded with a culmination meeting on December 6, 2019.

The following people attended the meeting: Pamella Oliver (Provost), Brent Foster (Asst. VP for Undergraduate Studies and General Education), Sheryl Fontaine (Dean, HSS), Jessica Stern (Associate Dean, HSS), Zakyi Ibrahim (Chair), James Santucci (Faculty), Jeanette Reedy Solano (Faculty), Bradley Starr (Faculty), Mugdha Yeolekar (Faculty), and Su Swarat (Asst. VP for Institutional Effectiveness).

The Provost commended the program for doing an excellent job with a small number of faculty. Specifically, the following accomplishments were highlighted:

- Curriculum is robust and responsive to the changes in the field and the needs of the students.
- Activities reflect components of the current university mission including global engagement, local service, and diversity.
- Hiring practices support the department's commitment to a global and diverse perspective.
- Faculty are accomplished and respected scholars with global scope.
- Faculty are engaged in local communities including doing volunteer work and fundraising.
- Students expressed receiving excellent advising from energetic and dedicated faculty.
- New efforts in Jain Studies and Islamic Studies are impressive and should help to appeal to an increasingly diverse student population.
- Secured a \$150,000 contribution from the Jain Temple in Los Angeles in 2018 to support the Bhagwan Shantinath Program in Jain Studies for five years.
- Has cultivated important relationships with religious institutions in Southern California.

Major recommendations and issues raised through the PPR process were discussed as follows:

1. Showcase the accomplishment of alumni:
 - The external reviewers commended the program for having a strong record of placing graduates in top graduate programs. The faculty stated that the impact does not only limit to majors but also minors. Examples were provided where graduates accomplished impressive careers in law and education, and students with minors were inspired by the program to join the Peace Corps.
 - The Chair commented that the department wants to showcase the diverse career trajectories students can pursue with a Religious Studies degree. The program is working with the college to further develop the department "spark" pages to feature distinguished alumni.
 - The Provost encouraged the program to continue publicizing alumni accomplishments.
2. Continue to explore online and hybrid offerings:
 - The faculty were commended by the external reviewers for their expertise in the latest technologies and online teaching best practices. The program provides about 60% of the courses online, which is high in comparison to other HSS departments.

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- The Chair stated that the department is proud of the online offerings, which are necessary to satisfy enrollment needs. However, online courses do not seem to be as effective to recruit majors or minors as face-to-face courses. This is the reason why the faculty are hesitant to turn 300 level courses online, as they are the important venues for attracting majors and minors.
 - The faculty reported that they have discussed the possibility of offering hybrid courses, but the impact on enrollment of majors/minors through such offerings is unclear. The faculty would like more data on how hybrid courses affect the enrollment of majors/minors. The Associate Dean agreed to conduct such study at the college level.
 - The Chair also voiced that students and faculty seem more comfortable with fully online courses, so there are also concerns about whether switching to hybrid would jeopardize course-level enrollment, which connects to funding.
3. Pursue more strategies to recruit more majors and minors:
- The Asst. VP for Undergraduate Studies and GE pointed out the small number of majors and minors in the program. He suggested the program to consider modifying degree requirements to increase double-major or minor opportunities. With EO1100r, the current 36-unit major requirement makes it difficult for students to double-major, as the total unit count can easily exceed the 120-unit graduation requirement (considering the scenario of 48 units in GE and 40 units in the first major). As such, the program may benefit from reducing the number of units to as low as 24 (with 12 at the upper division), which may make the program more attractive as a second major. Similarly, reducing the number of units needed for a minor degree (only need 12 units with 6 at upper division) may make the program more appealing as a minor option.
 - The Chair appreciated the information, and stated that the faculty will consider unit reduction to make the degrees more appealing to the students.
 - The faculty reflected that the number of majors or minors have fluctuated greatly over the years, so the program is realistic about the cycle of enrollment. The Dean commented that the program provides excellent foundation in humanities, but the campus conversation about its value is changing since the implementation of EO1100r.
4. Supply department with individual applicant information to allow appropriate outreach:
- The Chair expressed the desire to reach out to students who have been admitted but have not yet accepted the offer. This outreach effort would help increase the number of majors. The Dean supported this effort, and stated that it is currently challenging to receive this list.
 - The Provost acknowledged the need, and suggested the Strategic Enrollment Management group to look into this issue.
5. Generate more all-campus events that bring attention to the faculty and department:
- The faculty reported that many events in past 5 years have enjoyed wonderful attendance. While the preparation takes a lot of time and effort, these events have been very beneficial to the department. The faculty appreciated the help received from the college on advertisement and marketing.

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- The Provost recommended the department to collaborate with other HSS departments to offer combined events to make planning and outreach efforts more manageable.
6. Hire additional tenure-track faculty in the next two to three years:
- The Chair and the faculty stated the need to hire 1-2 faculty in the next 2-3 years, which would greatly help with course offering. With two FERP faculty members and one faculty member serving as the college Associate Dean, the program's FTEF numbers do not reflect the number of full-time faculty who can cover courses.
 - The Dean agreed to look into replacement for FERP faculty, and encouraged the department to consider co-hiring with other small departments, i.e. jointly hire faculty members who can share teaching obligations in multiple departments.

The Provost thanked the Chair for his leadership, and the faculty for their excellent contribution to the university.