

**Queen's University**  
**Executive Summary of the Review of the Academic Programs in the School of Religion**

In accordance with Queen's University Quality Assurance Processes (QUQAP), the School of Religion submitted a self-study on November 12, 2013 to the Faculty of Arts and Science, the School of Graduate Studies and the Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic) to initiate the cyclical program review of its undergraduate and graduate programs. The approved self-study presented program descriptions, learning outcomes, library report and analyses of data provided by the Office of Institutional Research and Planning and the School of Graduate Studies. Appendices to the self-study contained CVs for each full-time member in the School of Religion.

Three arm's-length reviewers (Dr. Frances Garrett, Associate Professor, Department for the Study of Religion, University of Toronto; Dr. Lorne Dawson, Professor, Department of Sociology & Legal Studies, University of Waterloo; and, Dr. James Carson, Professor and Chair, Department of History, Queen's University) examined the materials and conducted a site visit on April 3-4, 2014. The site visit included interviews with the vice-provost (teaching and learning), vice-provost and dean and associate dean, graduate studies, dean and vice-dean of arts and science and meetings with undergraduate students, graduate students, librarians, cognate heads, staff and faculty.

In their report (May 12, 2014), the review team provided feedback that describes how the School of Religion's programs meet the QUQAP evaluation criteria and are consistent with the university's mission and academic priorities. The review team noted that the undergraduate academic programs offered by the School of Religion were very strong and a tribute to the dedication and capabilities of the core faculty. The school also received high praise for its MA program with its remarkably high levels of completion and considerable student satisfaction. In particular, the review team noted graduate students' appreciation for the amount of support and mentoring they were receiving from their supervisors.

The review team did report on a number of challenges including: shifting one of its two required undergraduate theory and methods courses from the third year level to the second year level; replacing the three-year continuing contract position in Judaism with one in Islam; rebranding the MA program in terms of two or three specific areas of study; strengthening the connections between religious studies and cognate departments, improving the school's website and reviewing the workload of its administrative staff.

Based on all of the above documentation, a *Final Assessment Report* and an *Implementation Plan* were prepared by the vice-provost (teaching and learning) and approved by the provost (December 1, 2014).

The academic programs in the School of Religion have been approved to continue and are scheduled for their next review in eight years (2021-2022)

Prepared by the vice-provost (teaching and learning)  
November 11, 2014

## **Final Assessment Report & Implementation Plan for the Cyclical Program Review of the Academic Programs in the School of Religion**

In accordance with Queen's University Quality Assurance Processes (QUQAP), this final assessment report provides a synthesis of the external evaluation and the internal response and assessments of the graduate and undergraduate programs delivered by the School of Religion. This report identifies the significant strengths of the programs, together with opportunities for program improvement and enhancement, and it sets out and prioritizes the recommendations that have been selected for implementation.

The report includes an implementation plan that identifies who will be responsible for approving the recommendations set out in the final assessment report; who will be responsible for providing any resources entailed by those recommendations; any changes in organization, policy or governance that will be necessary to meet the recommendations; who will be responsible for acting on those recommendations; and, timelines for acting on and monitoring the implementation of those recommendations.

### **Summary of the Cyclical Program Review of the Academic Programs in the School of Religion**

The School of Religion submitted a self-study to the Faculty of Arts and Science, the School of Graduate Studies and the Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic) on November 12, 2013. The self-study presented the program descriptions and learning outcomes, an analytical assessment of the academic programs, and program data including the data collected by the Office of Institutional Research and Planning and the School of Graduate Studies. Appended to the self-study were a number of documents including CVs for each member of the School of Religion and the library report.

Two arm's-length external reviewers (Dr. Frances Garrett, Associate Professor, Department for the Study of Religion, University of Toronto and Dr. Lorne Dawson, Professor, Department of Sociology & Legal Studies, University of Waterloo) and one arm's-length internal reviewer (Dr. James Carson, Professor and Chair, Department of History) were selected by the vice-provost (teaching and learning) in consultation with the deans of arts and science and the graduate studies, from nominations submitted by the School of Religion. The review team evaluated the self-study documentation and then conducted a site visit to Queen's on April 3-4, 2014. The site visit included interviews with the vice-provost (teaching and learning), vice-provost and dean and associate dean of graduate studies, dean and vice-dean of arts and science and meetings with undergraduate students, graduate students, librarians, cognate heads, staff and faculty.

In their report (May 12, 2014), the review team provided feedback that describes how the School of Religion programs meet the QUQAP evaluation criteria and are consistent with the university's mission and academic priorities. The review team noted that the undergraduate academic programs offered by the school were very strong and a tribute to the dedication and capabilities of the core faculty. The school also received high praise for its MA program with its remarkably high levels of completion and considerable student satisfaction. In particular, the

review team noted graduate students' appreciation for the amount of support and mentoring they were receiving from their supervisors.

The review team did report on a number of challenges, including strengthening the connections between religious studies and cognate departments, improving the school's website and reviewing the workload of its administrative staff.

The director of the school, after consultation with faculty and staff in the school, submitted a response to the review team report (May 20, 2014). The dean of the school of graduate studies (May 22, 2014) and the vice-dean of arts and science (June 15, 2014) also submitted their responses to the provost's office. Specific recommendations were discussed, and clarifications and corrections presented.

Subsequent to receipt of the review team report and the internal responses from the school, the dean of arts and science, and the dean of graduate studies, the senate cyclical program review committee (SCPRC) dedicated its meetings of June 4 and September 23, 2014 to this particular discussion.

The SCPRC would like to recognize the following strengths:

- High quality of teaching and well-articulated learning outcomes
- Excellent student satisfaction scores
- High completion rate and excellent graduate student-supervisor ratio
- Increased overall undergraduate enrolment over the past five years by 50%
- Quality and quantity of its service teaching

The SCPRC would like to identify the following opportunities for enhancement. The school is encouraged to continue to:

- Build collaborations with cognate units as they diversify their course offerings
- Encourage their students to prepare for studying subfields of religious studies by engaging in language training
- Articulate a coherent medium to long-term vision for faculty recruitment to create a succession plan for a sustainable faculty complement and continued leadership
- Pursue re-evaluations of its two staff positions with Human Resources
- Address the variable research productivity of its faculty members

## **Summary of the Reviewer's Recommendations with the Department's and Deans' Responses**

### **Graduate Program**

The review team recommends that the MA program should be rebranded in terms of two or three specified areas of study, ones which realistically reflect the strengths of the program.

*The school noted that when it removed its MA field "religion and modernity" the intention was to do some evaluation of the program and curriculum to see whether any other field(s) might be appropriate. The curriculum committee and the school's MA committee will undertake these discussions in 2014-15 in light of the reviewers' comments.*

*The vice-dean of arts and science responded that he concurred that the current approach of presenting several "fields of study" around faculty expertise for the graduate program is a good strategy on which to sustain a flexible program based on a small faculty complement. He noted, though, that it will be valuable to re-visit the value of having an identified theme or themes, as was the case when the "religion and modernity" theme was the centerpiece of the MA program.*

*The vice-provost and dean of the School of Graduate Studies responded that if a 'centre' of sorts is established it would provide a vibrant interdisciplinary learning culture for graduate students and faculty in cognate departments as well as within the School of Religion. Should this come to fruition, the SGS will assist with marketing the innovative opportunities to prospective graduate students. It will also support curricular changes and/or changes in program structure (e.g. fields) that may follow, secondary to identified strengths or foci of a centre. If this is the case, a clear rationale would exist for the formation of graduate fields of study; otherwise the reviewers' recommendation to rebrand the MA with two or three areas of specialization is, in the opinion of the SGS, premature.*

### **Undergraduate Program**

The review team recommended shifting one of its two required undergraduate theory and method courses from the third-year level to the second-year level. The review team saw two advantages: i. equipping students with the kinds of discipline-specific knowledge that would help them to better maximize their gains from the other religious studies courses taken; and, ii. providing an opportunity for religious studies majors to become aware of each other earlier, and hence enhance the opportunity for the development of the positive cohort effect experienced by many religious studies students.

*The School of Religion responded that it recognizes the underlying issue and the school's curriculum committee will give priority to discussing the moving and/or changing of one of the two third-year required courses.*

*The vice-dean of arts and science responded that this recommendation is worthy of serious consideration given the reasons cited by the reviewers.*

### **Faculty Complement**

The review team recommended that the three-year continuing contract position in Judaism, which came to an end in 2014, be replaced with one in Islam. The review team noted that a chair in Jewish studies exists already, and that in the contemporary context Islam represents both the second largest and one of the most dynamic and consequential religious forces in the world. The report went on to say that students would benefit from greater exposure to, and understanding of, this other great global tradition and its impact on so many aspects of world affairs.

*The director of the School of Religion responded that ideally the school would like to replace the full faculty line in Judaism (which was lost with the retirement of a full professor) and build up strength in the teaching of Islam. The school has in place a one-year non-renewable position in Islam for 2014-15 and intended to submit a Queen's National Scholar application for a position in Islam to begin in July 2015.*

## Implementation Plan:

Recommendation	Proposed Follow-up	Responsibility for Leading Follow-up	Timeline for Addressing Recommendation
1. The School of Religion should engage its students, at both the undergraduate and graduate level, in the digital humanities (i.e. the use of new media and new technologies in the organization, creation and dissemination of knowledge). As the review team points out, training in the digital humanities is advantageous for students as it can be applied for research, collaborative practice, and knowledge dissemination.	Initiate discussions with relevant deans, associate deans, library, director of the school and senior faculty	Relevant associate deans, and as appropriate the library and other units	Dean of arts and science's <i>annual report</i> to the provost 2016  Vice-provost and dean, graduate studies' <i>annual report</i> to the provost 2016
2. The School of Religion should explore the viability of creating a centre for interdisciplinary study of religion. As noted in the review team report, such a centre would provide a vibrant interdisciplinary learning culture for graduate students and faculty in cognate departments, as well as within the school. It would also raise the profile of religious studies at Queen's University and in the local area, as well as amongst comparable universities in North America.	Consult with vice-principal (research), cognate department heads, arts and science and the school of graduate studies to initiate discussion and create business plan for the creation of a centre	Director of school, associate vice-principal (research), relevant associate deans	Dean of arts and science's <i>annual report</i> to the provost 2016  Vice-provost and dean, graduate studies' <i>annual report</i> to the provost 2016
3. To build on recent transitional experiences, the school should develop a mid-term strategic plan that focuses on a shared vision for the next three to five years.	School to organize unit retreat	Director of school	Dean of arts and science's <i>annual report</i> to the provost 2016  Vice-provost and dean, graduate studies' <i>annual report</i> to the provost 2016

**The dean of arts and science and the vice-provost and dean, graduate studies, in consultation with the director of the School of Religion shall be responsible for monitoring the implementation plan. The details of progress made will be presented in the deans' annual**

reports and filed in the Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic). Monitoring reports will be posted on the university web site.

**Final Assessment Report & Implementation Plan**

10.12.14  
Approval Date

**Vice-Provost (Teaching and Learning)**

  
Signature

**Dean, Faculty of Arts and Science**

  
Signature

**Vice-Provost and Dean, School of Graduate Studies**

  
Signature

**Final status of academic programs in the  
School of Religion**

**Approved to Continue**

**Date of next program review**

**2021/2022 Academic year**