

## **Internal Academic Review Committee Report on the Review of the Department of Religious Studies**

### **Department of Religious Studies**

The Department of Religious Studies offers a high calibre program delivered by a faculty dedicated to teaching and student learning. In addition, external reviewers commented on the remarkable quantity and quality of research, scholarship, grants and awards for a unit of its size. Reviewers noted the refreshing degree of respect and collegiality within the Department and the high quality and enthusiastic students the program attracts at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. In agreement with reviewers, the IARC encourages the Department to raise the visibility of Religious Studies within the Faculty of Arts and Science and the University.

The IARC commends the Department of Religious Studies for successfully launching a new Masters program in “Religion and Modernity” and at the undergraduate level, for recently increasing the number of students enrolled as concentrators as well as in popular elective courses. Furthermore, this growth has been accomplished with little or no increase in institutional funding or resources. In support of the Unit’s ongoing efforts to maintain its high standards in both teaching and research, the IARC makes the following recommendations.

### **Major Recommendations**

1. **UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM:** The IARC note that all participants in the review commented on the high quality of the Religious Studies program and its faculty. Students extolled the expertise and pedagogical skills of their professors as well as the amount of personal attention they receive. The launch of the new Masters program along with the influx of several new faculty members had led the Department to commence a curriculum review of the undergraduate program. Within this process, the IARC encourages a review of second and third year prerequisites in order to provide opportunities for students to join the program in upper years. In addition, the IARC

supports continuing efforts to engage cognate units in discussions on cross-listed courses and jointly appointed faculty.

*The IARC recommends that the Unit continue the curriculum review and engage members of the Department of Religious Studies and leaders of the Faculty of Arts and Science to build and encourage inter-disciplinary relationships between cognate departments.*

2. GRADUATE PROGRAM: By all accounts, the launch of the new Masters program in 2001 has reinvigorated the intellectual life of the Department and provided support for both teaching and research. Reviewers advise the Unit to continue their efforts to build connections with other departments in order to broaden the range of courses and areas of research that are available to graduate students. In addition, the Unit is encouraged to mplenshi

Outcomes of the Review

*Response submitted by the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science and the Head of the Department of Religious Studies*

**Outcomes of the Internal Academic Review of the Department of Religious Studies  
Joint Response from the Department of Religious Studies  
and the Faculty of Arts and Science**

**Recommendation 1**

A curriculum sub-committee is currently at work. The Department is preparing to revise the prerequisites to permit easier entry by upper-level students into upper-level Religious Studies courses.

The Department is strongly committed to developing more interdisciplinary connections with other departments. Doing so will, however, require receptivity and cooperation from other units.

**Recommendation 2**

The curriculum sub-committee is investigating the possibility of expanding the number of required courses in the programme. There has been a concerted effort to improve communication to students about dates, timelines, requirements, and other aspects of the programme. After the currently-contemplated curriculum changes have been introduced into the programme, the Department will also introduce new tools for the recruitment of students.

Follow-up on these recommendations and issues will take place in the annual budget and staffing strategy meetings between the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science and the Vice-Principal (Academic).

**REPORT OF THE REVIEW TEAM  
FOR  
THE ACADEMIC REVIEW OF THE DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

**Process**

In August 2003, a team was put together under the terms of the Senate policy and document, *Internal Academic Review*, to carry out an academic review of the Department of Religious Studies (RELS) at Queen's University. We all received the five volumes that were put together by the Department of Religious Studies.<sup>1</sup> We met as a team several times in the fall of 2003: to discuss the documentation supplied by the Department of Religious Studies, to voice questions that we had and to discuss additional material that was requested, and to meet with Pam Dickey Young, the head of Religious Studies for a discussion and a tour of the facilities.

After a hiatus, we finally met with the two groups of external reviewers in June 2004: Dr. Michel Desjardins, Professor of Religious Studies and Chair of the Department of Religion and Culture, Wilfrid Laurier University; and Dr. B. Barry Levy, Professor of Biblical and Jewish Studies and Dean of the Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University, as one team; and Dr. Linell E. Cady, Professor, Department of Religious Studies, Arizona State University, in a separate meeting. We met again in August 2004. The chair of the Review Team also met with the Dean of Arts and Science, Dr. Silverman, to discuss the proposed letter of agreement with the Queen's Theological College. The chair, Ruth Rees, wrote the first draft of this report; after several iterations, it was unanimously accepted by the Review Team, and then officially submitted to the Senate's IAR Committee.

Several unique aspects of this unit's review are noteworthy and caused internal delays. One, this internal review overlapped with the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies' review; two, this was the first internal academic review of the unit; three, this was the first external review of its graduate program, Master's of Arts in Religion and Modernity, a program that had started in 2001; four, Drs. Desjardins and Levy were to review the undergraduate and graduate programs for Queen's IAR and the graduate program for OCGS and Dr. Cady was to focus on both undergraduate and graduate programs for the IAR; five, the membership of our internal Review Team as well as the chair changed during the course of the year; and six, the unique 'arrangement' of the Department of Religious Studies within the Theological College and Queen's University caused the members of our Review Team to ask many questions in our attempt to understand the arrangement. Consequently, this review process has taken longer than the usual one-year time-line and has resulted in the Department of Religious Studies being left somewhat 'up in the air' in the interim.

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<sup>1</sup> The five volumes are entitled: The Graduate Program, Faculty CVs, Consultants, Self Study Report, and Appendices.

The Review Team noted that the thrust of the documentation submitted by the unit was geared toward the OCGS review, the review of the graduate program. Indeed, even the numbering of the volumes reflected this external priority, with volume 4 being the Self-Study Report, a document that usually is number one. Consequently, we raised many questions about the undergraduate program, resulting in our request for some additional materials, such as course outlines, and asked questions of the unit Head. This, we believe, delayed our thorough understanding of the Department of Religious Studies.

Our findings, comments, and recommendations below come from four sources: one, the material provided to us by the Department of Religious Studies; two, our meetings with the external reviewers and their subsequent reports; three, our meeting with the Head of Religious Studies and her response to the Desjardins and Levy report; and four, our group meetings. The term RELS used throughout this report means the Department of Religious Studies. **In general, we concur with most of the findings and conclusions of the external examiners.**

### *The Review Team's Findings and Comments*

Both external review teams noted the uniqueness of the arrangement between Queen's University and the Theological College in supporting the Department of Religious Studies. While this arrangement appears to work, for whatever reasons, it also is problematic. First of all, faculty members are not part of any collective agreement, although the fiscal arrangements with the Theological College and Queen's University appear to include similar benefits. A number of questions arise. Here are a few examples. What type of legal support would Religious Studies faculty members be provided with should a serious incident or conflict occur? What kinds of institutional controls exist for the Department of Religious Studies? If Queen's is moving to a more research-focused institution, *how* is this vision reflected within RELS? No other unit within Queen's has such autonomy, as does RELS. Does, for example, the Senate Committee on Academic Development review proposed changes to the RELS programs? If RELS wanted to increase its numbers of graduate students, what input is required from the Dean of Arts and Science into this process, and how would it affect the undergraduate programs?

Indeed, the fact that there are very loose connections between the Faculty of Arts and Science and RELS on the one hand, and a very visible and very tight link between RELS and the Theological College on the other hand, makes it very difficult in terms of student and faculty perceptions as well as logistically to reconceptualize the undergraduate and graduate programs as having an affinity to anything other than to the Theological College. Recommendations from all reviewers indicated that there should be a change in RELS' visibility and an increase in inter-departmental collaborations. Even the self-study document notes "it is difficult to combat these misperceptions when we are housed in Queen's Theological College and treated by the university for administrative purposes as 'theology faculty'." In our opinion, any change appears unlikely given the present formal institutional arrangement. Yet some important decisions have to be made imminently:

one, the possible replacement of two retiring Religious Studies professors; two, the renewal of the agreement between the Theological College and Queen's University Faculty of Arts and Science; three, curricular changes to the undergraduate program; and four, program review of the graduate program. All these issues are impacted by the existing structure and formalized governance arrangement.

***Recommendation 1:***

*The Department of Religious Studies should become more closely connected to the Faculty of Arts and Science, in terms of structure, governance, and faculty and staff members' roles and responsibilities, e.g., membership in QUFA and QUSA.*

***Recommendation 2:***

*The Department of Religious Studies should become more closely linked with other Faculty of Arts and Science departments both programmatically and with faculty members -- through cross-listed courses, cross- or joint-appointments, and other collaborative activities.*

### ***Undergraduate Program***

Perhaps because the focus of the self-study report seemed to be geared toward the graduate program, the description of and challenges to the undergraduate program appear to be, in our opinion, sketchy. Our knowledge has been supplemented by calendar information (in volume 5) and course outlines.

Revisions to the curriculum (presumably to the undergraduate courses) in Religious Studies were implemented in the academic year 2000-2001. According to the self-study document, the undergraduate curriculum was designed with certain goals. We found it surprising that only three courses are mandated: RELS 131 or 161, 353, and 451; yet many courses are offered. Given the small faculty cohort, perhaps some consideration should be given to reducing the number of course selections to ensure that the program goals are met. The Desjardins and Levy report (pp. 15-16) commented on this aspect as well:

The Department might want to exercise more control over what is offered in them [the required courses] each year so as to build a consistent base for students, and allow for evaluation of the graduating students that is based on a common set of experiences. The Department might also want to place its most engaging teachers in these courses...or at least assign them [the courses] so that they can be taught by everyone in the Department.

Both review teams recommended that the undergraduate program be reviewed. “[All faculty members’] voices need to be integrated into curriculum design, and their research strengths incorporated more overtly into course offerings,” as quoted from the Desjardins and Levy report (p. 15). Moreover, the review teams suggested that, the program should



Looking ahead, however, the 19 courses required for the BA (Honours) is problematic for those in Religious Studies considering a future teaching career. The pay scale for Ontario teachers is closely tied to their university education: one pay classification is for those graduates with a three year BA; another classification is for those with a BA (Honours) but that degree must be 20 (not 19) courses. **RELS may want to be proactive when revising its curriculum and change the BA (Honours) to include 20 undergraduate courses.**

We also recommend that RELS consider carrying out research as to where its undergraduates have gone, and into what areas of further post-secondary education and/or career choices. This knowledge may help in terms of advertising/promoting their programs to secondary school students and within Queen's itself.

***Recommendation 3:***

*The undergraduate program should undergo an internal review, to address the concerns raised above and those in the external reviewers' reports.*

***Recommendation 4:***

*RELS should ask the Faculty Arts and Science Calendar to remove the section under Religious Education Option "For those students intending to teach Religious Education in the Catholic School system."*

***Recommendation 5:***

*The revised BA (Honours) program should include 20, not 19, courses.*

***Recommendation 6:***

*RELS should carry out an annual survey to determine where, i.e., in what careers, the graduates from the BA program have gone.*

### ***Graduate Program***

The graduate program, an MA in Religion and Modernity, is still in its infancy stage, with seven students enrolled each year since its inception, in 2001. It is a one-year program that includes 4.0 course credits, comprising a one credit essay, two required half-courses (801 and 802), one half-course that is an elective, and 1.5 course credits for reading courses that are offered concurrently with a linked undergraduate course (meaning undergraduate and graduate students take the course, and the graduate students have additional requirements). Moreover, a bi-weekly colloquium is ongoing where faculty, graduate students, and upper-year undergraduates discuss different topics such as

It is admirable to see what RELS has accomplished with no increase in their block funding. However, there is a concern that the continuation and possible growth of the graduate program is dependent upon an increase in university funding, when the Dean of Arts and Science was not involved in the initial decision to offer the program.

Some members of our committee expressed strong reservations about the external examiners' suggestion to expand the M.A. program, especially in the absence of more specific information regarding the external demand for such a program. Moreover, we firmly believe that the Department should give serious consideration to the issues raised and recommendations offered by the external examiners **before** proceeding with any expansion of the program, as it is presently constituted.

It was difficult for our committee to determine the demand for this graduate program, as records do not appear to have been kept. We consider this an important, nay crucial, factor in determining whether the program is meeting the current demand, or whether there would be sufficient demand should the program be expanded to include more students, as the external reviewers suggested. Also we believe that it would be worthwhile to document how many of graduate students flow directly from the Religious Studies undergraduate program. This may help guide RELS when revamping the program, to ensure that course overlap does not exist between the two programs.

Our review team is in agreement with the issues raised in the external reviewers' reports. In particular, both reports mentioned the graduate students' concern that the one half course did "not provide them with a basis with which to understand religion and modernity" (Desjardins & Levy, p. 9). To quote Cady, "Given the centrality of this course to the graduate program, [we] would recommend that the faculty as a group take more ownership of this course and collectively identify some of the major theorists, theories, and trends that need to be covered in this core required course-- regardless of the instructor in any given semester," (p. 9). We believe that the theme, religion and modernity, should be interwoven through the entire graduate program. Indeed, this is what makes it a distinctive program within Canada.



- *Develop a strong research orientation within the graduate program;*
- *Consider a M.A. degree by thesis or, as well as, a research essay; and*
- *Encourage a cross-disciplinary focus.*

***Recommendation 10:***

*All information concerning the program, the timelines, the expectations, etc. should be documented and available for all stakeholders: graduate students, advisors, faculty members, support staff.*

**Advertising**

The web page for RELS is well done. However, it also advertises programs in the Theological College. We would suggest that this connection should be visibly reduced, and the Arts and Science connection(s) should be highlighted (as and when they develop between RELS and other units in Arts and Science). Note that the web page URL has changed since the Desjardins and Levy report was submitted in June to <http://rels.queensu.ca>.

Dr. Cady suggests that RELS “develop materials (e.g., brochure, flyer describing course offerings for upcoming semester) that profile the faculty, courses, and reasons for majoring in religious studies” (p. 6). Drs. Desjardins and Cady suggest other ways of advertising the RELS programs: through posters and brochures to be left at conferences; by advertising in the main Canadian Religious Studies journal; by having more faculty members and graduate students attend conferences. We also suggest that RELS may want to become involved in Career Days at Queen’s University and in its outreach programs to inform secondary students and first-year Queen’s students about careers in Religious Studies.

Certainly having cross-departmental fertilization (between professors, courses, and students), as suggested by all reviewers, would also help promote the Religious Studies programs. As well, we suggest that a follow up on Religious Studies’ graduates of the BA and then MA programs (as is carried out by Alan Travers in the Queen’s Faculty of Education annually), could provide some important information to RELS and to potential students as to possible careers in Religious Studies.

***Recommendation 11:***

*The web page for RELS should be updated to include Queen’s Arts and Science information and links, as opposed to only including the Theological College information.*

***Recommendation 12:***

*As per the external reviewers’ reports, RELS should develop brochures for publicizing the graduate program both within and outside Queen’s University.*

***Recommendation 13:***

*RELS should carry out annual surveys to document where the graduates of the M.A. RELS have ended up. This information in turn could become part of the publications for advertising the program.*

**Conclusion**

We on the internal review team appreciate the documentation that was developed for the IAR. We also appreciate the responsiveness of the Head of RELS to our many queries and requests. We found the three external reviewers, Drs. Cady, Desjardins, and Levy, to be academics who are deeply committed to their field and who were proactive in their comments and suggestions. All of us want to see the programs in the Department of Religious Studies continue and continue to be successful. This report offers many suggestions on directions to help attain that objective.

Respectfully submitted,

Ruth Rees, PhD  
Chair

On behalf of the internal review team, listed alphabetically below:

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Ruth Rees, Education;  
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