Memorandum of Understanding

Department of Religious Studies
College of Liberal Arts
April 2010

This Memorandum of Understanding outlines the consensus reached by the Department of Religious Studies, the College of Liberal Arts, and the Division of Academic Affairs, based on the program review conducted in AY 2007/08. It outlines the goals to be achieved and the actions to be undertaken by all parties to this MOU during the next program review cycle. Progress toward goals is to be addressed in the annual report.

The internal and external reviews of the Department of Religious Studies show it to be one of the strongest such departments in the state of California. Its religious studies MA program is one of only three such state-supported graduate programs in our state, and is the only CSU program. Its graduate students hail from California’s premier private universities and the UC system, and the department offers its students a rigorous course of study in a subject that is clearly of increasing importance in the 21st century. The department has strengths in the study of sacred texts and their cultural contexts, and in the consideration of contemporary religion. The department has developed numerous linkages with other academic programs in the College of Liberal Arts, and hopes to develop more through joint hires.

Concerns emerging from the program review include these issues:

1. The undergraduate curriculum has three courses currently required of all students (RST 401, and 2 courses chosen from RST 100, RST 102, and RST 103). An additional 9 courses must be taken in at least two of the department’s three areas of specialization: Asian religions; Western religions; and contemporary religion. The external reviewers have recommended collapsing these three areas to two: Sacred Texts and Contexts, and Religion in the Contemporary World.

2. Only one course is required of all MA students (R/ST 401/501), and only 4 free-standing graduate courses exist at the 600 level (not counting thesis, independent study, or special topics).

3. At the time of the external review, the department had recently hired two scholars conversant with issues of gender (Pandya and Stewart), and employed a third (Johnson), a Womanist theologian and ethicist, in a position shared with Women’s Studies. These instructors’ courses included gender as a significant vector of analysis. The department had also completed revision of RST 3021 to include a vigorous gender issues component, to 25% of the course, and RST departmental courses overall had begun this process of revision. However, the department needs to make further progress in using the perspectival parallax arising from a consideration of the full range of our human diversity (including gender, race, sexual orientation, and all forms of otherness) as a vector of analysis in its courses and programs.

4. The department has developed preliminary assessment plans for both degree programs but needs to move to the implementation phase by taking direct measures of student learning, analyzing the evidence collected, and using it for program improvement.
5. While much informal advising occurs, there needs to be more formal advising for both undergraduate and graduate students, including mid-program checks on student progress.

6. The department may be facing a loss of FTES enrollments in RST courses because of recent changes in General Education program policy. The Department and the College need to work to make sure that such changes do not unduly penalize the department.

7. The external reviewers note that the Library has been “unresponsive to department efforts to ensure that high-quality scholarly books in the field are purchased with the very limited annual budget.”

8. The external reviewers express concern over a lack of coordination in the College of Liberal Arts in hiring tenure-track positions in the area of religion and religious studies.

It is therefore agreed that:

1. The Department of Religious Studies will undertake a comprehensive revision of its undergraduate curriculum, giving very careful consideration to the specific suggestions of the external reviewers, including streamlining the degree.

2. The Department of Religious Studies will create additional free-standing graduate courses at the 600 level and it will continue to strengthen the graduate experience of its MA students, including reducing the reliance on 400/500 courses to ensure that MA students have at least 60% of their instruction in graduate-only courses.

3. The Department will follow the recommendations of the external reviewers concerning the currency and balance of its curriculum in both curriculum and program development, and will give great importance to them in hiring when the four TT positions by which it is currently understaffed are filled. These positions will be restaffed as soon as budgets allow.

4. The Department of Religious Studies will move immediately to implement assessment of student learning in each of the two (undergraduate and graduate) degree programs, analyze direct evidence of student learning, and adopt an ongoing process for use of the results for program improvement.

5. The Department of Religious Studies will formalize its advising activities, instituting mid-course advising for all students to monitor degree progress.

6. With the help and on the recommendation of the College the Department of Religious Studies will move its courses out of GE Category C.3 and into other appropriate GE categories. The Department will work to increase its undergraduate enrollments as it is able, given current fiscal constraints and the overall decline in enrollments at CSULB.

7. Representatives from the University Library, the College of Liberal Arts, and the Department of Religious Studies will work together to develop an effective plan for establishing and maintaining adequate scholarly and academic holdings and other similar resources in the discipline of religious studies.
8. There will be strong decanal and administration support for protecting the developed areas of inquiry of the Department of Religious Studies. In no way is this to be understood as precluding hires in the area of religion and religious studies by other departments at the university. There will be coordination with the Department of Religious Studies under the aegis of the Dean’s office so that current positions at the University are not duplicated and the University’s coverage of the deep cultural phenomenon of religion is maximized.

This MOU has been read and approved by:

Department Chair

College Dean

Vice Provost

Date  April 28, 2010
Date  4/28/2010
Date  4-28-10