

BA and MA in Religion & Culture 2015 Annual Implementation Report

Submitted by: Dr. Carol B. Duncan, Associate
Professor & Chair

On: April 27, 2015

Implementation Plan from 2011-2012 Final Assessment Report

Recommendation: logic of undergraduate programme to be made clearer	
Responsibility: Department	Implementation Date: Fall 2012
Recommendation completed (2013).	

Recommendation: consultation with Seminary and Global Studies.	
Responsibility: Department	Implementation Date: Fall/Winter 2011-12
Recommendation completed (2014).	

Recommendation: can department continue to emphasize both fieldwork and textual studies in the master's program?	
Responsibility: Department	Implementation Date: Fall 2012
Recommendation completed (2013).	

Recommendation: advertise for new tenure-track hire.	
Responsibility: Department, after final authorization from Dean	Implementation Date: Fall 2012
Recommendation completed (2013).	

Recommendation: better integration of BA, MA and PhD.	
Responsibility: Department	Implementation Date: Fall/Winter 2011-12
Additional Notes: Department will provide Deans with a report by April 30, 2013.	
Recommendation completed (2014).	

Recommendation: develop a strategic plan for next 7 years re admin positions.	
Responsibility: Department	Implementation Date: Fall 2012
Recommendation completed (2013).	

Recommendation: collect data from other programmes to determine if "success" measured by majors or enrolments.	
Responsibility: No need to implement (see text) - # of Majors relative to # of faculty is low; total enrolments only mid-range for Faculty	Implementation Date: N/A
Recommendation completed (2013).	

Recommendation: Department needs to increase majors and/or increase enrolments	
Responsibility: Department	Implementation Date: Fall 2012 (so that any changes can be approved by Senate in time for 2013-14)
Recommendation completed.	
Arts Decanal Comments: It's not clear to me that this recommendation has been implemented. The number of Majors, if anything, seems to be declining and this is likely due – as I have indicated to the department in conversation with the Chair - to a structural complexity (re requirements for the Major) that could and should be simplified. The low number of Majors is not justified by departmental enrollments. The Department needs to do more work on this with the goal of simplifying the Major by the end of Fall 2014	
PRS Comments: Please provide an update on this recommendation in next year's report.	
2014-2015 Actions (check one): <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Completed <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please explain):	
Unit Actions: In response to the Dean of Arts' recommendation for program simplification, the Department of Religion and Culture after sustained discussion submitted a proposal for curriculum changes along with other substantive minor changes. These changes were subsequently presented to the Faculty of Arts Council by Michel Desjardins, Associate Dean of Arts and they were unanimously passed at the meeting of Friday April 17, 2015. If approved by Senate Academic Planning and Senate, these changes will take place in September 1, 2015.	
The BA program simplification changes include the following:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. RE307: Reading Religious Texts and RE308: Conducting Fieldwork have been removed as required courses for majors at the third year level. These methods courses will still be taught on a rotational basis but they will no longer be required of Religion and Culture majors. The department plans to follow through on a recommendation of the department-in-council to encourage, where applicable, inclusion of material on methodology in third year courses. So, for instance, in the third year course RE333: Food and Religion, students could be taught about fieldwork as a part of how they conduct studies on food practices and religion. This practice is already in place, in course design and curriculum choices. With the elimination of RE307 and RE308, RE207: Studying Religion and RE407: Research Seminar will remain as required courses. 2. In addition to RE100: Religions of the Americas I: Indigenous, African and European and RE101: Religions of the Americas II: Asian and Middle Eastern, any combination of first year 0.5 credit Religion and Culture courses will be accepted as satisfying a junior level credit in Religion and Culture. The department has large enrolments in other courses including RE103: Love and Its Myths, RE104: Evil and Its Symbols. Both of these courses are also currently taught through Online Learning. RE105: Religion and Cinematic Culture and RE106: Religion and Visual Culture are also first year courses Religion and Culture. By generalizing this first year requirement, the hope is to increase enrolment of majors by providing encouragement/incentive to students who have already taken these courses. 3. The requirement for 'breadth' across several categories of religions has been 	

dropped. This requirement was initially included to ensure that students in Religion and Culture decades ago would move beyond the study of Christianity as a type of 'basis' for religious studies. There have been sufficient changes in student expectations, faculty practice and curriculum offerings that 'breadth' is addressed in course choices without the need to impose the somewhat artificial demands of the previous categories. Doing away with the internal 'breadth' requirement will further simplify degree requirements.

4. At Marilyn Watson's request re: the 'sunset clause,' the department recently undertook a 'housekeeping' of its roster of courses recommending courses for elimination that had not been taught/were no longer reflective of the program's aims and new faculty. We believe that this supports the recommendation of program simplification in that it presents a more accurate and up-to-date listing of course offerings for students.

The department notes that while the numbers of Religion and Culture majors have decreased, the department has more or less maintained the numbers of students taught in intramural courses. Additionally, Religion and Culture is a leader in online education at Laurier, offering the second highest number of courses within a department at the university. Between 2009-2014, the department taught 10,300 students in online Religion & Culture courses. Religion and Culture has responded to the call for proposals through Ontario Online, a provincial initiative designed to improve student mobility and degree completion. Through the Centre for Online Learning, funding was successfully garnered and a new course development for RE103: Love and Its Myths was designed and launched in 2014. A second application was successful and RE212: World Religions in Cultural Context is currently in development for launching later this year also through Ontario Online. These courses are intended for a broader prospective student base in the province of Ontario which will further impact the growth of enrolments in Religion and Culture courses. These additional courses will allow the department to be the first at Laurier to offer a fully online Honours Bachelor of Arts degree. Pending approval, this option for degree completion has the potential to increase the number of majors for the Department by offering students a more flexible pathway to degree completion.

All of the aforementioned changes and initiatives are designed to increase the number of enrolments in the Department, and present Religion & Culture majors with a more simplified and flexible program structure.

Decanal Comments: The department is to be congratulated for the curricular reforms recently passed. I agree that these reforms – especially the elimination of the area requirements (see #3 above) – has resulted in a more flexible Major that will make it easier to attract students to the program. The Department is also, as noted, a leader in online education within the Faculty

PRS Comments: We appreciate the Department providing an update on this final recommendation and consider it completed.

Recommendation: develop ways of preparing fourth year students for grad school.

Responsibility: Department

**Implementation Date: Fall/Winter
2012-13**

Recommendation completed (2014).

Additional Recommendation from the Program Review Sub-Committee: At its November 11th, 2013 meeting, Senate Academic Planning approved the following motion: “that the Senate Academic Planning Committee, on the recommendation of the Program Review Sub-Committee, approve the inclusion of a university-wide recommendation on each Annual Implementation Report that, prior to the next cyclical review, the program develop a means for assessing program learning outcomes.” A full explanation of the rationale behind the motion can be found here:

http://legacy.wlu.ca/documents/56385/PRS_Recommendation_for_Annual_Implementation_Reports_SAPC_Nov_11_2013.pdf

The committee recommends that the Department begin having conversations about program learning outcomes assessment and put together a strategy for collecting and presenting evidence of this assessment in its next cyclical review.

Additional Comments (PRS): The committee would like to commend the Department on their efforts to implement the recommendations that came out of the cyclical review over the past three years. As the recommendations are now all considered to be completed, no future reports will be necessary. The Department’s next scheduled cyclical review is for the 2018-2019 review cycle.