

**Senate Committee on University Planning
Academic Unit Review Summary:
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

Site Visit	20 March 2014
Informal Response to Planning	23 June 2014
Formal Response to Planning	7 November 2014
Implementation Update	15 April 2016
Midterm Review	2017-18 (8-year cycle)

Summary of Departmental Self-Study: The Department of Religious Studies was established in 1960, although the study of religious thought and theology has a much longer history at Mount Allison University. At the time of the review, the department had three full-time faculty as well as the University Chaplain who teaches part-time. Courses related to many of the world's major religions, particularly in the Western and Eastern traditions, are at the heart of the department's offerings. Faculty currently teach up to 10 different courses in rotation. This practice reflects the department's desire to meet the interests of students and to represent the scope of Religious Studies as a disciplinary field.

The department offers major, honours, and minor programs, and enrolments include a significant number of students majoring in other fields (i.e., service teaching is high in the department). Enrolments are strong. The department has focused on the identification of learning outcomes for each of its courses, and has examined the ways in which courses offered by the department lead to scaffold learning. The aim is to assist students to progressively build their understanding of a body of technical knowledge and skill that will aid them as they advance to more advanced courses. Students graduating from the Department of Religious Studies leave very well prepared for graduate studies in religion.

Members of the department have been recognized for their accomplishments as teachers and researchers. The Crake and Tucker teaching awards have been bestowed upon members of the department, and SSHRC and various other external and internal grants have been awarded to members of the department. In addition, members of the department are actively involved in community service and outreach, and thus the reach of the department extends well beyond the University.

Summary of Program Review Report: The executive summary includes comments of very high praise for the department. It reads in part: "the Department of Religious Studies rates very highly in terms of quality of teaching, service and research for a unit of its size. They deliver a high quality undergraduate program sensitive to the needs of their students and academic and non-academic communities."

The reviewers recommend that strengthening the department's programs can occur through the following: (1) further review of the curriculum to reflect changes occurring in religious studies (away from a focus on religious traditions to more interactionist approaches); and (2) interdepartmental and inter-institutional collaboration to enhance course offerings available to Mount Allison students. As well, the reviewers recommend that the number of courses offered by the department be reviewed and that the number of courses any individual member of the department might be expected to teach be reduced from 10 to 5-6. In doing this type of review of curriculum and teaching, concerns about workload issues amongst members of the department might be addressed, at least in part. The reviewers recommend that the department explore ways to reduce the demands on faculty members by instituting a more strategic rotation of courses. The reviewers recognize that the department's curriculum review process is a work-in-progress.

The review also includes comments relating to matters that are not specific to the Department of Religious Studies. One area identified is the recommendation that sufficient resources be allocated when members of the department are away on sabbatical leave, and another area focuses on a suggestion for university-wide discussion about the balance between teaching and research.

Summary of Departmental Response: The department reflected on each of the areas of the review report, and expressed its commitment to build on the curriculum review completed in 2011. The department indicates that further changes are necessary in light of the addition of a new faculty member in 2014. (This new faculty member brings the faculty complement to four.) In addition, the department indicates its commitment to examining the impact of establishing a rotation of courses that will essentially meet the needs and interests of students, provide adequate disciplinary scope, while perhaps reducing the workload of faculty.

The department has embraced the suggestion to increase collaboration at Mount Allison and within the region. A number of opportunities for greater connection have already been explored, and can be expected to continue in the future. Of particular note is the intention to strengthen the collaboration between Religious Studies and Philosophy. The department also is committed to exploring co-teaching within and across departments. Finally, the department is looking at ways to strengthen textual study with the analysis of material culture. This will further strengthen the department's curriculum and programming.

Planning Committee and Provost Response: The Planning Committee and the Provost regarded the review of the Department of Religious Studies in positive terms. The strengths of the department were acknowledged throughout the Planning Committee's discussions. The Planning Committee strongly concurs with the recommendations of the reviewers that the department continue its curriculum review in order to reduce the course offerings to a more manageable number. There is recognition that the current high number of courses in the curriculum reflects the desire

to reflect breadth in the discipline and meet student interest, but there is very clearly a need to balance students' needs and desires alongside the workload concerns of faculty. The Planning Committee encourages the department not to delay the next phase of its review until 2016. Incremental changes may be made before then to the benefit of all concerned. Such changes may also incorporate some of the suggestions about depth vs. breadth teaching within the discipline that were proposed by the review team.

Resource matters (e.g., sabbatical leave replacements) and the teaching-research balance will inevitably be discussed within the broader university community as part of the annual budgeting process and in upcoming strategic planning processes, respectively.