

**Comprehensive Program Review (CPR)
Department of Religious Studies
Georgia State University
July 2020**

The following programs are critical to the institutional mission and thus MEET the institution's criteria for retention:

Bachelor of Arts with a major in Religious Studies (38020101)

The Department offers a minor, a B.A., and a dual-degree (B.A./M.A.) in Religious Studies. Majors average 45 per year (about 12 graduates per year) with 26 minors. All of the steps in our Action Plan impact the undergraduate curriculum, and steps 3 and 4 focus on expanding a religion and health/health professions path and developing applied (CTC) curriculum in the major and minor.

Master of Arts with a major in Religious Studies (38020101)

The Department offers an M.A. in Religious Studies, with concentrations in Non-profit Management in collaboration with the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies and Religion and Aging with the College's Gerontology Institute. In cooperation with WellStar Health Systems, we offer a WellStar Fellowship annually, and the recipient works alongside WellStar's Assistant VP of Ethics, Advanced Care Planning, and Spiritual Health while earning the MA. On average, the program enrolls 24 students. Recent graduates have gone on to PhD programs, MD/MBA programs, and careers in education, nonprofit management, and entrepreneurship. Action steps 3 and 4 directly address M.A. curriculum and GTA training, and steps 1 and 2, which focus on strengthening the faculty and faculty research, will impact future applicants' interest in our programs as our areas of research grow.

Provost/VPAA Signature and Date _____

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Provost/VPAA's Designee Signature and Date

 7/30/20

Georgia State University
Department of Religious Studies
ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW ACTION PLAN (2019)

Status of the Action Items from Prior Review

The Department underwent review in 2009, and no action plan exists from that cycle. Institutional memory suggests that the 2009 APR cycle resulted in resources for tenure-track hires and support for our new core course, which became the funding model for our MA program. Since that time, the Department has invested resources in its emphasis on Religion and Public Life; in creating an Alumni and Friends Advisory Board; and in MA program expansions, including two new concentrations (Nonprofit Management and Religion and Aging) and one fellowship with WellStar Health Systems. Alongside our work with WellStar, which includes hiring WellStar ethicists as instructors, the concentrations model future directions for developing our Applied Religious Studies identity in the major.

Major Findings in Current Review

1. Religion and Public Life: Applied Religious Studies. Our Department stands apart in the field because of our distinctive Religion and Public Life orientation and our applied approaches, more generally. As the external reviewers note, "The Department of Religious Studies at GSU is distinguished by its entrepreneurial initiatives, most notably the growing potential of Applied Religious Studies. This fits the reputation of this department: it is extremely innovative and imaginative and is a pace-setter in the field" (10). Applied courses, internships, MA concentrations, and other opportunities to work with community partners appeal to our students. In fact, the external reviewers described learning with community partners as "*being acculturated to the GSU approach*" (3, emphasis added). Orienting our applied approach around religion and health builds on existing relationships with alumni and community partners in health professions. With a reputation for innovation and an identity built around applied approaches highlighting religion and health, we aim to attract more majors and graduate students, as "departments that have a defined specialty tend to have higher enrollments than those that take a more open view to the curriculum" (8).
2. Faculty Strength, Size, and Stability. The Religious Studies faculty includes University and College administrators, award-winning scholars and teachers, and researchers publishing in prestigious peer-reviewed journals and university presses. As the APRC report notes, our unit "performs impressively in comparison with its peer programs and, more broadly, with highest research activity programs across the country." As reflected in the department's Report, the Dean's Letter, and the external reviewers' report, the size of our faculty and its stability are major concerns. Most critical to this Action Plan is the external reviewers' observation that "many of these [research and curriculum] goals are simply aspirational with the current faculty. The goal of focusing on Applied Religious Studies with a focus on health and wellness seems achievable if faculty hires are in line with that goal in the longer term" (10). While praising our creative approaches to maintaining prominent research profiles and innovative curriculum, they observe, "The greatest challenge in this department is sustaining the M.A. program with such limited faculty . . . this alone is a reason for more tenure-track lines, and it is also a compelling reason to focus on Religion and Public Life and Applied Religious Studies" (11).
3. Refreshing the Major: Religious Literacy, Interdisciplinarity, and the Core Course. As part of compiling the Self-Study Report, department faculty identified several ways to refresh the

major, including by adopting a focus on religious literacy, identifying and acting on interdisciplinary opportunities, and updating our core course (RELS 2001 Intro to World Religions) to include modules on religion and health. In the next few years, we plan to regularly cross-list many of our courses and expand our Honors offerings. We are also working to ensure more of our courses count as approved electives in programs with students interested in health professions. The aim of these initiatives is to make the field accessible to a greater number of students and to recruit more minors, majors, and MA students.

4. Assessment. The department had not conducted regular assessments during the period under review and was unable to supply the data requested in the Self-Study. Generating assessment data on a regular basis is critical to our ability to evaluate our progress toward the goals outlined below.

Action Steps for the Coming Cycle

The Department of Religious Studies aims to secure faculty stability and expand our national reputation as a stand-alone MA program emphasizing applied approaches, especially in religion and health. Our department can provide an invaluable experience of gaining an understanding of our world and fostering transferable career skills while being responsive to the needs and outcomes of our diverse student body. We have tailored our M.A. tracks to integrate an applied approach through community partnerships, and we are committed to incorporating applied pedagogies into our major. We see this as a feasible path for public university faculty with commitments to lessening the “intellectual inequality” gap. To achieve these goals, we plan to:

1. Strengthen academic and research programs through strategic hiring.
In response to the college’s annual call for hiring priorities, the Chair will request faculty lines in areas of strategic importance to the department. Our first search for an Assistant/Associate-level colleague in Religion, Race, and Health is underway. The department anticipates requesting additional hires to support growth around our applied approaches. We acknowledge that college resources may not be available to support each of the hires, and much of the plan that follows is not dependent on these new positions.
2. Support research-active faculty and maintain high-quality research.
 - a. Develop and implement a policy for the targeted use of funding, including professional development and Foundation funds. (Year 1)
 - b. Take greater advantage of the resources at the Humanities Research Center (HRC), including assistance in drafting applications for internal and external research funding. (Year 1 and ongoing)
 - c. Develop and implement a research mentoring plan for faculty. (Year 2)
 - d. Expect research-active faculty to apply for internal and/or external funding at least once within a three-year period. (Ongoing)
3. Expand our Religion and Health focus. This focus fits the Georgia State student well, and we expect it will attract a number of students to the program. In addition, it will prepare them for specific career paths.
 - a. Build a religion and health/health professions pathway in our major to attract more minors, double-majors, and majors. (Year One and ongoing)
 1. Integrate a module on religion and health into the core course;
 2. Create and add new courses focused on religion and health to the catalog; and

3. Build and strengthen interdisciplinary connections to support courses in religion and health by cross-listing courses and requesting they be approved electives in targeted programs, including biology, sociology, and psychology.
 - b. Host a public-facing academic event to draw attention to our focus on religion and health. (Year One)
 - c. Facilitate course marketing and interdisciplinary introductions for new faculty member in religion, race, and health. (Year Two)
 - d. Renew our MOU with WellStar Health Systems and expand our collaboration in keeping with our program's growth. (Year Four)
 - e. Increase the number of majors or double-majors in our unit by 10% by creating a pathway for health sciences and health professionals students into our major. (Year One and ongoing)
 - f. Evaluate the major and MA curricula with respect to faculty hires and future directions. (Years Four and Five)
4. Integrate an applied approach to Religious Studies into the major and MA. Our major initiatives will focus on our core course and classes required in the major. Moving forward, faculty will include applied approaches in elective courses and report on the success of those approaches as they relate to GSU's CTC QEP in their annual evaluations. During this time, the RELS 2001 Director will be responsible for maintaining evaluation and assessment records the unit uses to measure these changes' impact on student learning in the core course.
 - a. The RELS 2001 Director will develop and include a module on religion and health and integrate applied approaches (e.g., community partnership projects) into his sections of 2001. (Year One and ongoing)
 1. The Director will include the new module and approaches in the teaching practicum for our GTAs, and the Director and GTAs will begin to teach the new module. (Year One)
 2. The Director will evaluate the new module and approaches and revise them as appropriate. (Year Two)
 3. The Director will work with colleagues at Perimeter College to explore integrating religion and health and applied approaches into the sections of 2001 they offer. (Year Three)
 4. The Director will assess applied approaches in 2001, including those taught at Perimeter, and make recommendations for moving forward to the faculty. (Year Four)
 - b. Faculty will develop an applied skillset and incorporate applied approaches into their courses. They will highlight applied courses' SLOs, strengths, and weaknesses in their annual reports. (Year One and ongoing)
 1. Faculty will adopt applied approaches in required courses. (Year One)
 2. Faculty will integrate applied approaches into elective courses. (Year One and ongoing)
 3. Faculty will add new applied courses to the catalog. (Year One and ongoing)
5. Conduct regular assessment.
 - a. The faculty will meet for a two-day workshop to review the alignment of courses and programs with the department and institutional missions and identify ways to assess individual courses and the undergraduate and graduate programs, especially with respect to applied approaches. (Year One)
 - b. The department's assessment coordinator will develop and implement academic program assessment plans for the BA and MA. The Executive Committee will work with the assessment coordinator in an ongoing basis to ensure that academic program assessment occurs each year. (Year One and ongoing)

Signatures



Molly Bassett, Chair

8/29/19


Date



Sara Rosen, Dean

8/29/19

Date



Wendy Hensel, Interim Provost

8/30/19

Date