College of Arts & Sciences  
Dean’s Response to Self Study Report of the  
Department of Religious Studies  
January 7, 2009

The self-study written by the Department of Religious Studies is exemplary as a starting point for the review of the department’s achievement and goals. We want to thank the chair of the Self-Study Committee, Kathryn McClymond, as well as the other members of the program review committee: Dr. Jonathan Herman, Dr. Timothy Renick, and Kenneth Smith, a graduate research assistant in Religious Studies. We appreciate all the time and effort that this endeavor required.

The Dean’s Office notes with approval the impressive development of the department and its faculty since its inception. The historical narrative detailing how the department began as a subunit in the Department of Philosophy in the late 1990s, how it became an autonomous unit in 2005, how it has created a strong BA and MA in Religious Studies, and how it has recently begun to offer a course in World Religions in the core curriculum is extremely helpful as we undergo the first program review of the Department of Religious Studies. We particularly want to applaud the quality of the department’s academic programs, as reflected in the data related to incoming students and the prestigious placements of the department’s graduates. We also recognize the strong research productivity of the faculty, which has occurred in the context of substantial programmatic change. We appreciate the department’s focused pursuit and achievement of the goals laid out in the joint Philosophy/Religious Studies self-study in the previous cycle.

The upcoming visit by the external review team provides the department and the Dean’s Office with an excellent opportunity to review the progress of the Department and to sharpen our vision for its future. To this end, we will focus here on the goals and objectives put forward by the department in its self study and leave decisions about new resources until the action plan is formulated during later steps in the program review process. Overall, the Dean’s Office is pleased with the direction that is plotted in the department’s goals and objectives and agrees with many of the recommendations in the report. In particular, we strongly support the addition of faculty to help with the department’s burgeoning student demand. We also support the goals of continuing to strengthen the academic program, and providing future space and technology for the department to realize its potential. We focus below on several points where we believe that further information and analysis would be useful as we plan for the department’s future. We hope that the external review team will be able to help us gain greater clarity concerning these matters.

First, we would like the external review team to provide us feedback on the department’s target goal of becoming one of the top five Religious Studies programs in the southeastern United States in this review cycle. Initially, we would like the team to assess whether this goal is a sufficient aspiration. Does the unit have the potential to reach national rankings over the next five years or is the regional ranking more
appropriate? Once the team agrees on the target, can it specify which universities are model programs at that level? What resources would be necessary for Georgia State University to join them?

Second, we would like the external review team to strategize ways to strengthen research support for the department in these difficult budgetary times. We would appreciate the team’s input on available external funding sources for faculty and graduate student support, development strategies that might be particularly suited to the GSU program, and other approaches that could help us continue to build the research profile of the department.

Finally, we would appreciate the external team reflecting on how best to scale up the size of the Religious Studies program without serious tradeoffs with the quality of the program. With the anticipated demand both for the department’s program and the core curriculum, we would like the team’s creative input on the future of the program. What is the best approach for allocating current instructional resources? Are class sizes appropriate at the core, undergraduate and graduate levels, or would you suggest changes? What other approaches would ease the transition of the department into a larger unit?

The Dean’s Office again congratulates the Department on its impressive strides to date, and we thank the Department of Religious Studies for this report. The Dean’s Office looks forward to the external reviewers’ visit and to working with the Department on an action plan that will make their goals achievable in the next five years.

Carol Winkler, Associate Dean 1/9/09
Lauren B. Adamson, Dean 1/9/09