

## **External Reviewers' Narrative Report Philosophy and Religion**

### **CURRICULUM**

The department offers three majors: Philosophy, Religion, and a combination major of Philosophy and Religion. The curricular requirements for these majors are complemented by General Education requirements that provide an excellent interdisciplinary base for the majors.

#### **Philosophy**

The department follows the general guideline offerings recommended by the American Philosophical Association covering core areas in philosophy: logic, metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics, as well as Ancient and Modern historical course. The study of the history of philosophy is important for providing students with a good framework for understanding traditional problems and the relationship of philosophy to the sciences and other disciplines. Students are also required to take an Individual Studies course, which puts them in close interaction with one of the department faculty members. This is an excellent arrangement of the curriculum since it provides both the basics and the opportunity to focus on areas of interest to the individual student. It is also possible for students to cover contemporary topics in courses like Existentialism and Phenomenology, Philosophy of Mind, Feminist Theory, and Ethics and the Professions. It is likely that when the current faculty searches are completed these curricular offerings will expand to cover more specific topics in applied ethics and analytic philosophy. This will provide additional opportunities for students to pursue their interests.

#### **Religion**

The Religion curriculum is a comprehensive set of undergraduate courses that provide special opportunities for studying both American and world religions in some depth. The faculty, who are highly qualified in the study of American religion, offer excellent courses in this area. In addition, one of the great strengths of the department is a faculty who can teach courses in a wide variety of world religions: Christianity, Judaism, religions of India, China, Japan, and other areas. The curricular offerings mirror the strengths of the faculty, and the faculty are strong in a wide variety of areas. As a result, the students receive an excellent education. Like Philosophy, Religion also offers courses in Individual Studies and in Research.

#### **Philosophy and Religion**

This combined degree builds a balanced program on the combined curricular resources from the two individual programs, and exploits the important synergies that exist between these two subject matters. Since the curricular offerings in both Philosophy and Religion are more than adequate, the combined curriculum is also strong.

## **Student opportunities for research**

Supplementing opportunities for close work with faculty members in Individual Studies and Research courses, department majors are required to complete a senior project or department honors project under the direction of a faculty member. Philosophy majors are encouraged to submit their finished research projects to a regional undergraduate philosophy conference.

## **Outcomes**

The department defines specific outcome expectations for their students, including skills in bibliographic construction, writing, reading and textual analysis – all important skills for continuing research in philosophy, religious studies, other humanities, and other disciplines. Critical thinking is built into the department's curriculum. In philosophy courses, the analysis and construction of arguments and the explicit emphasis on logical argumentation contributes greatly to the development of critical skills.

The department uses College Base results to measure outcomes, the results are quite impressive. In general Philosophy and Religion majors tend to score higher than both UTC and College of Arts and Sciences majors on the College Base Exam given to graduating seniors. Over the past three years, for example, Philosophy and Religion majors have average scores close to 20% higher than UTC scores, and over 14% higher than CAS scores. Although these results are based on a small number of graduating seniors, the consistency of measures over a several year span indicates that the department is doing an excellent job in preparing its majors. These data clearly demonstrate that the department attracts good students and sharpens their skills, especially in the area of critical thinking. In addition, while both college and university scores have declined over these years (e.g., from 296.05 in 2000-01 to 287 in 2002-03 for UTC) the department scores have increased (from 331.38 in 2000-01 to 390 in 2002-03).

## **Updating curriculum**

At any university curriculum needs to be constantly updated. This often happens as the result of hiring new faculty members and the introduction of new courses, but also as the result of continued faculty research in their areas. UTC faculty in Philosophy and Religion have very strong research agendas and are actively engaged in research. As a result courses are constantly adjusted to address the latest research results and emerging issues. The department is also in the process of hiring two new faculty members in the area of philosophy, and this should result in the expansion and enhancement of current curricular offerings.

## **Development of alternative offerings**

One of the most exciting developments in the department includes the expanded offerings in world religion courses. The new chair, William Harmon, brings an expertise on Indian religions to the department, reflected in the course Religions of India. This supplements an already strong international focus developed in courses on Judaism (Prof. Resnick),

Religions of China, and Japan, and a new course on Islam (Prof. Eskildsen). The representation of non-Western religions is extremely strong for a department of this size, and it is one of the most impressive aspects of the department. Furthermore, the development of international study programs abroad, for example, the summer program in India that is being initiated by Prof. Harmon, will enhance this important dimension of the department. This is all the more impressive given the strong expertise that the department also has in American religions (e.g., Prof. Lippy, who is a leading expert in this area).

## **FACULTY**

### **Competencies**

The Department faculty is an outstanding group of well-trained, highly talented individuals. Excellent hires have been made over the years both with respect to curricular development and collegiality. On the Religion side, the range of faculty competencies reflect a balance between Eastern and Western traditions that many Departments in other schools would find enviable. On the Philosophy side, the correspondence between faculty competencies and the subdisciplines within the academic enterprise of Philosophy is exceptionally strong.

### **Quality of Teaching**

The quality of teaching in the Department is universally high. Commitment to excellence in teaching is firmly entrenched in the ethos of the Department, and faculty members take pride in each other's successes in the classroom, as well as in both the rigor and accessibility of their own teaching. Students told us that taking courses in Philosophy and Religion prepared them to think critically and gave them a grasp of intellectual history that contributed enormously to their success in other courses outside the Department. The six majors we met with made it very clear that their coursework in the Department had opened doors for them that would not otherwise have been opened, and that their courses in Philosophy and Religion had clarified and transformed their sense of what they might accomplish with their lives. The students we met with were articulate, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable. We had the sense that they would hold their own and shine in relation to Philosophy and Religion majors elsewhere.

The students regard their faculty instructors with profound respect. They expressed heartfelt gratitude for the education they are receiving, and for the dedication shown by their instructors both to learning and to them as people. The appreciation expressed by these students for their teachers, and for their education, was striking.

### **Changes and Improvements**

In light of the extraordinary strength of this teaching faculty, the administrators of the College and University need to ensure the stability of faculty lines within the Department. For reasons beyond the Department's control, the University has not been

able to retain some of the younger faculty in Philosophy. This “revolving door” situation puts undue stress on a Department that is otherwise an exemplar of stability. The impact of this drain on Departmental stability extends beyond the Department. Faculty members in Philosophy play essential roles in the gateway courses in Humanities, both as faculty responsible for covering several sections, and as representatives of an academic discipline that has been a mainstay of intellectual thought in Western history, and many would say, a mainstay of Western civilization. For the College and University to maintain integrity in the liberal arts, commitment has to be made to retaining of outstanding philosophers for the gateway courses. There is an important symbolic statement to be made here about commitment to intellectual rigor, as well as a practical need for commitment to curricular integrity.

### **University and Community Service**

Faculty service both to the University and to the larger community is extensive. Department members have made significant contributions to the development of the institution, and contributed to numerous efforts to help the institution weather current shortfalls in financial resources. Department members also play a visible role in the larger community, serving as outstanding ambassadors of the University.

### **Head’s workload**

The department head, William Harmon, is working hard to make the department function in a smooth and efficient way. Besides his duties as head, he is also expected to teach five courses per year. He is organizing a major international studies program in India for the summer. He has only a part-time office assistant. In addition to all of this he is maintaining a significant research agenda. In effect, the head is in need of some reduction in load. We think that his research is important, both for his own academic life, and as it contributes a strong dimension to the department. It may be necessary to transform the part-time office assistant position to full-time, or find more office help, and in addition reduce the head’s teaching load by at least one course.

### **CONNECTIONS WITH STUDENTS**

The quality of faculty connections with students is exceptional. Faculty dedication to students is strong, and many students sense that dedication, and respond to it with dedication to their own education. The most obvious way to increase the number of students taking coursework in Philosophy and Religion is to maintain the strongest possible presence of Department faculty in the gateway courses, and to continue to insist that the design of at least some of those courses enable Philosophy faculty to teach philosophy.

The Department maintains a good system for advising students about coursework, and about career choice and graduate study. Faculty are accessible to students, and offer a variety of extracurricular activities, including the Philosophy Club, special lectures, informal discussions in coffee houses, and invitations to faculty homes for special dinners.

## **DIVERSITY/INCLUSIVENESS**

In its curricular offerings the department does an good job in offering courses that include diversity dimensions. In Philosophy, Feminist Theory, and in Religion, the courses on different world traditions (especially religions of the East), provide important dimensions that expose the students to diverse points of view. In addition, the research and teaching of Prof. Lippy often focuses on African-American religious expression.

The faculty itself does not reflect a high degree of diversity. In this regard the most we can say is that there is one woman on the faculty, and it seems possible that there could be more emphasis placed on recruiting women in future searches. No ethnic minorities are represented in the faculty. This is more difficult to address because of the relatively small number of Ph.D's awarded to minorities in Philosophy and Religion, but to the extent that special diversity hiring programs are offered at the university, the department is interested in finding minority candidates. Short of this, attempts could be made to import diversity through lecture series or colloquia that students could attend.

## **RESOURCES**

The inadequacy in library resources are at the top of the list as defined by the current faculty members in the department. For both Philosophy and Religion, books and journals are absolutely essential for research and teaching. Often research needs can be addressed by interlibrary loan (ILL), although this requires advanced planning for timely delivery of materials, and that is sometimes a problem. ILL is more awkward for student research, and library holdings in Philosophy and Religion are not up to date even for undergraduate student research. In addition, library journal holdings are inadequate for the research and teaching needs of this department. Unfortunately, to address these inadequacies does require a budgetary commitment. It should be kept in mind, however, that Philosophy and Religion programs are relatively inexpensive to run, and their service to other areas of university education (especially the General Education program and the Honors Program) more than pay their way. Adequate and up to date library resources is one of the few things that will keep these programs operating at an excellent level. It should nonetheless be noted that the departmental faculty have been doing an extraordinary job both with their research and in making materials available for students in their courses in a situation where library resources are not the best. Funding for external visitors, lectures, colloquia, and philosophy club events is also an area that ought to be addressed. There seems to be very little money in the operations budget, to support such special programs.

There appear to be serious problems in connection with technical support for faculty computers and with faculty access to technological resources. Although the Faculty Resource Center is primarily focused on teaching, much more could be done to facilitate faculty access to technology for both teaching and research.

Although the new program in international studies (organized for India in the summer of 2004) is off to a good start, some long-term funding support for that program is essential if this important initiative is to develop and possibly expand to include other countries.

The current operations budget is so tight that it is difficult to see how any further savings could be made to fund any new initiatives.

Finally, it is quite impressive that the department is the beneficiary of two named chairs, the LeRoy A. Martin Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies, and the Professor and Chair of Excellence in Judaic Studies. To gain the full benefit of these endowed positions, however, sufficient funding over and above salaries should be forthcoming through the endowments for travel, lecture series, and special events.

## **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **Ranking**

For an undergraduate program with a small faculty, the programs in Philosophy and Religion at UTC are extraordinarily strong. Every faculty member has a developed and active research agenda, and most faculty members have done extensive research in their areas. The faculty, both in terms of research and teaching, are at a rank that one would expect to find in the best graduate programs in the United States. There is no "dead wood" in this department. In addition, despite difficult budgetary constraints, morale and enthusiasm for research and teaching remain very high. The department has an excellent spirit. The faculty members have a genuine concern for undergraduate education, and this shows through in the high degree of respect that the students show toward their professors.

In effect, for an undergraduate program, the Religion faculty, which is more senior and stable, and which has two endowed chair positions, would be ranked among the best in the nation for its size. The philosophy faculty, which is younger and still in formation, holds great promise that is supported by an excellent collegial spirit in the department. To some extent this will depend on the quality of the new hires. To a great extent, however, Talia Welsh is already contributing to an excellent program as is excellent teacher and as someone who has an already impressive research record.

### **ARE THE DEPARTMENT'S GOALS AND OBJECTIVES APPROPRIATE?**

Concerted efforts the Department is now making to hire two philosophers at the assistant professor rank are very appropriate. In our view, the hiring and retention of these new faculty members is a priority objective. Department efforts to create opportunities for international study are also highly appropriate. International programs of study are an excellent complement to the international scope of the Department's curriculum, and offer wonderful opportunities for student research and involvement in faculty research, as well as opportunities for field experience, and language development. These opportunities contribute to graduates' admittance and performance in graduate study, as well as to their education and exposure to diversity while at UTC.

With regard to recommendations regarding teaching, faculty qualifications, and faculty development, we would emphasize the importance of enabling faculty to maintain

the excellent balance between teaching and research that they currently achieve. In our opinion, the outstanding teaching of this department depends on the ability faculty members have to keep up with and participate in the ongoing research of their field.

The opinion of the reviewers coincides completely with the opinion expressed by one of the majors during our meeting with students, that this department is a jewel.

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