

UTQAP Cyclical Review: Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan

1. Review Summary

Programs Reviewed:	Buddhist Studies, Hons. BA: Specialist, Major Islamic Studies, Hons. BA: Major Religion, Hons. BA: Specialist, Major, Minor Religion: Christian Origins, Hons. BA: Specialist Study of Religion, MA, PhD
Unit Reviewed:	Department for the Study of Religion
Commissioning Officer:	Dean, Faculty of Arts and Science
Reviewers (Name, Affiliation):	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Constance Furey, Professor and Chair, Department of Religious Studies, Indiana University Bloomington2. Sylvester Johnson, Assistant Vice Provost for the Humanities, Professor, Department of Religion and Culture, and Director, Center for Humanities, Virginia Tech3. David Quinter, Associate Professor of East Asian Religions, Associate Chair, Graduate, East Asian Studies Program in Religious Studies & Department of East Asian Studies, University of Alberta4. Vesna Wallace, Professor and Director of Graduate Studies, Department of Religious Studies, University of California at Santa Barbara
Date of Review Visit:	June 2-3, 2021 (conducted remotely)
Date Reported to AP&P:	April 12, 2022

Previous UTQAP Review

Date: October 4-5, 2012

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

1. Undergraduate Programs

The reviewers observed the following **strengths**:

- The rich range of courses and fieldwork opportunities available to undergraduate students

The reviewers made the following **recommendations**:

- Developing a Specialist option for the undergraduate program in Islamic Studies and adding academic staff and administrative support for this area to meet increased demand

2. Graduate Programs

The reviewers made the following **recommendations**:

- Pursuing the proposed Master of Religion in the Public Sphere and assessing its long-term financial sustainability and the staff required to support it

3. Faculty/Research

The reviewers observed the following **strengths**:

- The distinguished faculty with international reputations

4. Administration

The reviewers observed the following **strengths**:

- The undergraduate and graduate programs' innovation, creativity and breadth
- The Department's commitment to teaching

The reviewers made the following **recommendations**:

- Addressing the unavailability or limited availability of language instruction in certain areas, which limits the undergraduate and graduate student study of major religions

Current Review: Documentation and Consultation

Documentation Provided to Reviewers

Terms of reference; Self-study & Appendices; Previous review report including the administrative response; Access to all course descriptions; Access to the curricula vitae of faculty.

Consultation Process

Dean, Vice-Dean Academic Planning, and Associate Dean, Unit-Level Reviews, Faculty of Arts & Science; Department Chair; Associate Chair Undergraduate; Director of Graduate Studies; Junior and Senior Faculty; Tri-campus graduate faculty; Undergraduate and Graduate students; Administrative staff; Chairs/Directors of relevant cognate units including Classics (UTM), Anthropology, Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, Centre for Indigenous Studies, East Asian Studies, Philosophy, Jewish Studies, and Political Science (all A&S).

Current Review: Findings and Recommendations

1. Undergraduate Program

Unless otherwise noted, all bulleted comments apply to all programs reviewed.

The reviewers observed the following **strengths**:

- Objectives
 - ▶ Learning outcomes are clear and appropriate
- Admissions requirements
 - ▶ Numerous initiatives developed to address undergraduate enrolment challenges; encouraging increase in 2020-21 enrolments
- Curriculum and program delivery
 - ▶ Exciting new roster of thematic courses focused on existential issues confirms advantages of moving away from tradition-based model
 - ▶ Explicit focus on writing in all DSR courses is commendable
- Student engagement, experience and program support services
 - ▶ Undergraduates report general satisfaction with the program
 - ▶ Reviewers commend student involvement in process of reconceiving first year course

The reviewers identified the following **areas of concern**:

- Curriculum and program delivery
 - ▶ Major Curriculum Program Map is unappealing and difficult to understand
- Student engagement, experience and program support services

- ▶ Some undergraduates note confusion around degree requirements, and difficulty with finding answers to specific questions

The reviewers made the following **recommendations**:

- Curriculum and program delivery
 - ▶ While reviewers commend past success of specialized programs in Christian Origins (suspended), Buddhist Studies, and Islamic Studies, they recommend cutting all three programs and organizing the undergraduate program under the area of 'Religion', with a modified stream model
 - ▶ Overhaul first-year course, given intellectual problems with 'World Religions' model
 - ▶ Reviewers commend proposed plan to offer 3-4 of the new thematic first year courses on a rotating basis
 - ▶ Redesign or retire Major Curriculum Program Map
 - ▶ Students express desire to have language count for the major; reviewers urge DSR to prioritize planning process to better articulate role and support for languages
- Student engagement, experience and program support services
 - ▶ Reviewers note that issues with helping students navigate degree requirements should not be sole responsibility of DSR
 - ▶ Range and amount of research opportunities are adequate, but should be better advertised to students

2. Graduate Program

Unless otherwise noted, all bulleted comments apply to all programs reviewed.

The reviewers observed the following **strengths**:

- Overall quality
 - ▶ PhD program very impressive in terms of breadth, depth, and quality of graduate faculty
- Objectives
 - ▶ MA students receive a grounding in theoretical approaches to study of religion; program's extensive research requirements produce graduates who are highly competitive for PhD admission
 - ▶ Graduate faculty keenly attuned to current state of discipline; this is reflected well in PhD's stated objectives, specific courses, and broader curriculum
- Admissions requirements
 - ▶ Decision to reduce the PhD cohort is appropriate, and may help with aims to increase base funding and provide better academic support to smaller number of students
- Curriculum and program delivery
 - ▶ Proposed MA Gateway Seminar promises to advance disciplinary depth, while providing opportunities to develop competency in a subfields of interest
 - ▶ Reviewers endorse recent curricular changes for both MA and PhD
 - ▶ DSR has taken significant steps since last review to strengthen and broaden language offerings, including in Hebrew; Sanskrit; Tibetan; Pali; and Arabic (via NMC dept)

- Student engagement, experience and program support services
 - ▶ Laudable Professionalization Seminar program that includes grant-writing workshops
 - ▶ Creative new SSHRC grant-writing workshop offered to MA applicants
 - ▶ PhD students enthusiastic about new “alt-ac careers” workshop, and alumni networking initiative
 - ▶ Graduate student input actively sought for self-study, and recommendations acted on, including in newly developed Anti-Racism, Decolonization, and Equity Action Plan
- Quality indicators – graduate students
 - ▶ Slight upward trend in average PhD Time-to-Completion, but this is consistent with FAS humanities programs, and remains reasonable relative to program’s rigor / other top religion programs
 - ▶ Recent efforts to reduce TTC include trying to raise the base funding level for students, reducing the incoming cohort of students, and topping up FAS Program Completion Award funding
- Quality indicators – alumni
 - ▶ Quality of admitted students appears appropriately strong; this is reflected in “enviably high” placement records
- Student funding
 - ▶ Approximately 25% of MA students secure SSHRC funding, making the program relatively attractive, given options typically available to prospective MA students
 - ▶ Reviewers applaud DSR’s recent initiative to create pooled fund for graduate support from faculty grants
 - ▶ Newly created TA coordinator position should help ensure equity of appointments across tri-campus structure
 - ▶ PhD students required to apply for SSHRC and/or OGS doctoral fellowship.

The reviewers identified the following **areas of concern**:

- Assessment of learning
 - ▶ Process for assessing research-language competency identified as significant point of concern: since every exam must be graded individually by a faculty member competent in the given language, there is no consistency to evaluations
- Student engagement, experience and program support services
 - ▶ Student mental health flagged as significant concern in PhD program – and likely MA as well
 - ▶ Unclear whether students know of, or feel comfortable making use of, available support resources, or whether these resources are adequate
- Quality indicators – alumni
 - ▶ Some faculty members and students expressed skepticism regarding basis for reported placement figures, which were culled from a much broader 2016 University of Toronto study
- Student funding
 - ▶ Funding structure a major point of concern in MA program

- ▶ Students express concern about how evenly funding is being distributed, how much of reported PhD income is based on employment (internal or external), and very high cost of living in Toronto
- ▶ Neither SSHRC nor most OGS scholarships are open to international students

The reviewers made the following **recommendations**:

- Curriculum and program delivery
 - ▶ Where possible and not yet implemented, reviewers recommend expanding to four-year training program in DSR's research-language offerings (eg. Sanskrit, Tibetan)
 - ▶ Conduct close consultation with graduate students in determining whether to allow languages to count towards graduate programs
- Assessment of learning
 - ▶ DSR urged to transition immediately to "hybrid" model that permits students to demonstrate language competency through either an exam or advanced language coursework, including online language courses, when appropriate
- Student engagement, experience and program support services
 - ▶ Extend pre-application MA grant writing workshop to PhD students, and include opportunities open to international students
 - ▶ Serious concerns around student mental health "[merit] the keen attention of all parties concerned, at the Departmental, Faculty, and University levels"
 - ▶ "DSR should work closely with the university administration to establish immediate and long-term strategies that support student mental wellness and to ensure that graduate students have access to and support from any new or existing university resources for addressing reports of harassment affecting students"
 - ▶ Expand student support initiatives further if possible; consider internship opportunities and offering postdoctoral and other limited-term appointments
- Quality indicators – graduate students
 - ▶ Issues with language training and exam structures must be resolved to ensure better Time-to-Completion rates
- Quality indicators – alumni
 - ▶ Reviewers affirm department's implementation of new placement tracking system in coming year, and proposal to introduce faculty placement officer
- Student funding
 - ▶ "The continued success of the program depends on improving funding access for MA students and raising the base pay for PhD students"
 - ▶ "Providing competitive funding for all MA students...would immediately distinguish the DSR's MA program internationally"
 - ▶ Open SSHRC/OGS application requirement to include other major grants, with approval of Supervisor and/or Graduate Director

3. Faculty/Research

The reviewers observed the following **strengths**:

- Overall quality
 - ▶ DSR faculty is “in a word, outstanding”
 - ▶ Many scholars have high-profile international reputations and impressive funding records
 - ▶ Significant research and teaching strength in all eight of DSR’s currently defined fields
- Research
 - ▶ Faculty consistently express enthusiasm for intellectual breadth of DSR, and ability to conduct research and pursue teaching interests with adequate support
 - ▶ Impressive faculty success in securing internal and external grants and awards
- Faculty
 - ▶ Faculty complement at undergraduate and graduate levels impressively large relative to leading comparator institutions

The reviewers made the following **recommendations**:

- Faculty
 - ▶ Pay regular attention to issue of service expectations, in particular for jointly appointed junior faculty; avoid overburdening non-tenured faculty with administrative positions

4. Administration

Note: Issues that are addressed through specific University processes and therefore considered out of scope for UTQAP reviews (e.g., individual Human Resources issues, specific health and safety concerns) are routed to proper University offices to be addressed, and are therefore not included in the Review Summary component of the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan.

The reviewers observed the following **strengths**:

- Relationships
 - ▶ Morale in DSR is generally positive
 - ▶ New leadership is energetic
 - ▶ Students praise intellectual mentorship in undergraduate and graduate programs
 - ▶ Staff very appreciative of investments in additional administrative support
 - ▶ Chair’s planned efforts to enhance partnerships with colleges are appropriate
 - ▶ DSR’s research strength derives partly from many joint appointments, and is facilitated by chair’s strong relationships with cognate programs
 - ▶ Excellent collaboration across academic disciplines and units; particularly the Centre for Indigenous Studies, Philosophy, and East Asian Studies
 - ▶ DSR maintains active level of involvement with external professional societies

- ▶ Reviewers commend DSR's endeavor to create more opportunities for greater global engagement through partnerships with international universities
- Organizational and financial structure
 - ▶ Recent reorganization of departmental staff and new administrative hires have formed a strong and effective managerial and financial administrative structure
 - ▶ Financial structure and use of financial resources are appropriate
 - ▶ New Shared Space Hub a welcoming space for gathering of faculty, students and staff, and will enable informal interactions and enhanced sense of community
- Long-range planning and overall assessment
 - ▶ DSR is "outstanding"; one of the best departments for the study of religion in North America
 - ▶ Impressive strengths in faculty research, graduate student training and undergraduate teaching; exemplary, multidisciplinary approach to study of religion
 - ▶ Reviewers praise Anti-Racism, Decolonization, and Equity Action Plan and attention to diversifying faculty complement, including efforts to think creatively about positions that would support area of Religions in North America and Turtle Island
 - ▶ DSR has successfully addressed several recommendations made in previous review
 - ▶ Reviewers commend all steps described in DSR's Quality Enhancement Plan
- International comparators
 - ▶ Top program in Canada for the academic study of religion, and one of the leading programs in North America and the world

The reviewers identified the following **areas of concern**:

- Relationships
 - ▶ Reviewers note potential impacts on equity and decolonization work within the DSR as a result of the 2021 CAUT censure of the University of Toronto
 - ▶ Urgent concerns regarding reports of harassment toward students and mental wellness issues
 - ▶ Current system of counting enrolments from cross-listed courses or courses taught by jointly appointed faculty members can result in tensions among departments
- Organizational and financial structure
 - ▶ Reviewers note possible structural advantages enjoyed by colleges in attracting new students to the study of religion
 - ▶ Absence of and need for greater transparency of decision making by various DSR committees
 - ▶ Due to space constraints, DSR foresees need to allocate shared offices in future, which would cause inconveniences in scheduling faculty office time, and disadvantage those who can't work from home

The reviewers made the following **recommendations**:

- Relationships
 - ▶ Reviewers identify room for additional engagement and collaboration with other units, such as the Department of Political Science
 - ▶ “Joint appointments must be managed judiciously to ensure an even distribution of service across units”
 - ▶ Need for complementary planning with other departments and colleges, and for better organized cross listing of courses, to equally record departments involved and enhance user-friendliness for students
 - ▶ “College-level programs might serve as a positive means for the DSR and other departments to collaborate and generate impact beyond the bounds of a particular discipline”
 - ▶ “There are clear opportunities for improving coordination and collaboration among the faculty and students at different campuses”; affiliated UTM and UTSC faculty desire more robust engagement with DSR across campuses
 - ▶ “It would be worthwhile to consider new ways to leverage intersections of public issues with the study of religion
- Organizational and financial structure
 - ▶ Overhaul of malfunctioning heating, cooling and air circulation systems in Jackman Humanities Building is needed
 - ▶ Reviewers support departmental plans to re-examine current governance documents and rewrite governance guidelines to ensure transparency and clarify procedures
 - ▶ Unless the DSR is given more office space, it will need to re-examine the system of allocating a personal office to faculty appointed at UTM and UTSC
- Long-range planning and overall assessment
 - ▶ Enhance current collaborative specializations with other U of T programs, and strive to find more ways to recognize, support, and clarify curriculum for cross-disciplinary specializations
 - ▶ Build on existing strengths in the study of “Religions in North America and Turtle Island”, and further the Digital Humanities initiatives already under way
 - ▶ Reviewers affirm call to “prioritize intersectional diversity in faculty hiring” outlined in DSR’s Anti-Racism, Decolonization, and Equity Action Plan



2. Administrative Response & Implementation Plan

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF ARTS & SCIENCE

March 11, 2022

Professor Susan McCahan
Vice-Provost, Academic Programs
University of Toronto

Re: UTQAP cyclical review of the Department for the Study of Religion

Dear Professor McCahan,

Along with the faculty, staff and students of the Department for the Study of Religion (DSR), I am pleased with the external reviewers' assessment of the DSR and its undergraduate and graduate programs: Buddhist Studies, H.B.A. (Specialist, Major); Islamic Studies, H.B.A. (Major); Religion, H.B.A. (Specialist, Major, Minor); Religion: Christian Origins, H.B.A. (Specialist); Study of Religion (M.A., Ph.D.). The reviewers complimented the DSR as *“outstanding--certainly one of the best departments for the study of religion in North America--with impressive strengths in faculty research, graduate student training, and undergraduate teaching and an exemplary, multi-disciplinary approach to the study of religion.”*

The quality of this program notwithstanding, as per your letter dated December 9, 2021, the review report raises a number of issues and challenges. I am writing to address the areas of the review report that you identify as key. The responses to these items and implementation plan are separated into immediate- (six months), medium- (one to two years), and longer- (three to five years) term, along with who will take the lead in each area. Where appropriate, I have identified any necessary changes in organization, policy or governance; and any resources, financial and otherwise, that will be provided, and who will provide them. The Dean's office has discussed the reviewers' comments through consultation with the Chair of the DSR, who consulted with the department, to develop the following implementation plan incorporating the reviewers' recommendations.

Implementation Plan

The reviewers recommended changes to the structure of the undergraduate programs, adopting a stream model organizing sub-disciplines within a single “Religion” program, in order to simplify program requirements, increase flexibility, and highlight the Department's interdisciplinary strengths.

Immediate-term response: The Department for the Study of Religion (DSR) will hold a faculty retreat in March 2022 to explore curricular reforms to the undergraduate programs in line with

the reviewers' recommendation. The DSR leadership has already begun consulting with faculty teaching in the DSRs various programs of study. This consultation is informed by the work done to develop program learning outcomes and review curricula (as part of the UTQAP self-study), which was accomplished with the support of Curriculum Development Specialist from the Office of the Vice-Provost, Innovation in Undergraduate Education.

Medium-term response: The DSR anticipates submitting major modifications proposals to the Faculty of Arts & Science Undergraduate Curriculum Committee in Winter 2023, pending the outcome of consultation and review.

The reviewers recommended improving communication regarding research opportunities for undergraduate students.

Immediate-term response: At the Faculty level, we regularly advertise research opportunities for undergraduates such as the Research Opportunity Program, Research Excursions Program, Upper-year independent study and research courses and the Jackman Humanities Institute Undergraduate Fellowships. The Faculty has increased activity and presence on social media in recent years, to great effect with broader reach and increased website activity. Dedicated, comprehensive and up-to-date information on research opportunities for undergraduates can be found on the Sidney Smith Commons (SSC) website. Sidney Smith Commons is a student-based resource dedicated to supporting the academic needs of students in the Faculty of Arts & Science. The SSC underwent a significant upgrade in 2019, both to its space and to the complement of students hired to serve other students.

Within the Department, the Associate Chair, the Undergraduate Program Assistant, and the Communications Officer are working together to ensure students at all levels are aware of program offerings, including research opportunities. The Department has engaged in a number of recent activities to improve communication and research opportunities for undergraduate students. For example, DSR held an Undergraduate Town Hall meeting in Fall 2021 to discuss research opportunities with DSR undergrads; the DSR Finance Officer gave workshops for faculty in Fall 2021 on how to hire undergraduate RAs and he joined the DSR SSHRC information session to alert faculty to how to best include undergraduate RAs in SSHRC budgets. Finally, DSR faculty and students are organizing an undergraduate research conference for March 25, 2022.

Medium-term response: The DSR plans to track faculty engagement with research opportunity programs to facilitate recognition in PTR assessments; ensure stories featuring DSR undergraduate research are shared on the DSR webpage and social media; ensure consistent offering of RLG404H, the Research Capstone course that is normally taught by continuing faculty with active research agendas.

The reviewers noted the means of assessing graduate students' language competency as a major concern, commenting on difficulty locating appropriate faculty members, arranging exams, and issues of consistency across evaluations; they recommended transitioning to a

hybrid model to permit students to demonstrate competency via either an exam or advanced coursework.

Immediate-term response: The DSR Language Committee is drafting a “Language Manifesto” to articulate the significance of language study in the DSR programs, and the committee has discussed expanding its mandate to include concerns raised about graduate students’ language competency.

Medium-term response: The Director of Graduate Studies in the DSR will undertake consultations on the language exam requirements and testing process in the Summer and Fall 2022. The Faculty will connect DSR leadership with the Vice-Dean, Graduate Education, who will support this process of curricular renewal with respect to language competency.

The reviewers commented that “the continued success of the [graduate] program depends on improving funding access for MA students and raising the base pay for PhD students”; they also noted student concerns regarding the distribution and structure of funding packages in light of the high cost of living in Toronto.

Immediate-term response: The Faculty has prioritized increasing base funding for graduate students. In 2019-20, we began a three-year program to increase graduate student funding, boosting the base funding package by \$1,500 over three years (\$500 per year). By 2021-22, base funding was at least \$18,500, plus tuition and fees. The Faculty recently (2021) affirmed a commitment to increase base funding by another \$1,500 over three years. In addition, the Faculty’s Program-Level Fellowships (PLFs), first rolled out in 2017 and currently equivalent to \$1,000 per student in the funded cohort, are provided directly to students in accordance with the academic priorities and goals of each graduate unit. These priorities are determined through annual consultation with faculty, students and staff. To better communicate the ways in which units choose to disburse these funds, Unit-level PLFs for 2020-21 and 2021-22 are published on the Faculty of Arts & Science, Graduate Students webpage. Finally, the Vice-Dean, Graduate Education and Vice-Dean, Research communicate student funding best-practices cyclically to Chairs and provide unit-level consultation on funding best-practices.

Working with the Dean’s Office and the wider University, the DSR is developing and implementing strategies for improving financial support for graduate students. DSR-specific initiatives include a new collective pool of research trainee funding drawn from faculty pledges from their own research funding. The Pool will raise the overall base funding available for students and, importantly, improve equity in graduate funding. It will also encourage a culture in which faculty apply for more grants and actively include graduate student funding in their research applications.

Medium and Longer-term response: The DSR intends to better track graduate student income levels across their years of study to ensure that they are aware of inequities that might develop across years of study.

The reviewers recommended broadening access to grant writing workshops for graduate students.

Immediate-term response: The Faculty offers dedicated support for grant writing through a Director of Graduate Writing Support appointed in the Faculty of Arts & Science. This office offers a variety of grant-writing workshops and other forms of writing support. Departments can request unit-specific grant writing workshops, or workshops that run within an existing graduate course. Additionally, the Director runs peer-review sessions (in which small groups of peers can provide feedback on grant proposals), an activity often paired with a grant-writing workshop. The DSR has already called on these resources many times, and the Faculty will ensure that the DSR continues to be aware of the scope of these resources.

To broaden potential access to grants, the DSR Graduate Administrator has created a SharePoint folder for funding opportunities, with a focus on “beyond SSHRC.” As international students are ineligible for SSHRCC grants, this effort should broaden access to grants. In addition, many graduate courses offered in the DSR, including some new, required “Gateway Seminars,” include grant-writing assignments in their syllabi.

Medium-term response: To build on the grant application support the DSR already offers its graduate students (such as a workshop for prospective MA students from any university before they have applied), the Graduate Experience & Progress Committee is developing a new slate of workshops focused on grant-writing, including postdoctoral fellowships and opportunities “beyond SSHRC.”

The reviewers noted graduate students’ mental health and experiences of harassment as urgent concerns; they recommended establishing immediate and long-term strategies for responding to reports of harassment within the Department, and for communicating with students regarding available mental health and wellness supports (*in the Response you may wish to comment on the workshops FAS has been holding for supervisors and graduate students related to harassment and mental health issues*).

Immediate-and-medium term response: As noted in the Faculty’s 2020-25 Academic Plan, the Faculty is committed to supporting student mental health and well-being and have been working in partnership with Accessibility Services, Health & Wellness, the Colleges, and the Vice-Provost, Students to ensure that we are implementing effectively the recommendations of the 2020 Report of the Presidential and Provostial Task Force on Student Mental Health and Wellness. To that end, the Faculty expanded support by adding a new role in 2019, a Mental Health Program Officer, who has since greatly expanded Faculty-level support particularly in terms of mental health training and education. This office now offers (for example) workshops for units, tailored to their specific needs, on a range of topics from Effective Communication, Workplace Conflict, Managing Difficult People, and Ways to Wellbeing.

It is worth noting that the School of Graduate Studies has also taken great strides to improve graduate student experience and well-being. It launched the Centre for Graduate Mentorship and Supervision in the Fall, 2021 – an initiative led by the FAS Director of High Risk, Faculty

Support and Mental Health (HR,FSMH, seconded to SGS). This is an important new resource designed to offer graduate students effective, personal, and confidential support to both manage and resolve conflict in mentorship and supervision relationships and help students and faculty build effective supervisory relationships.

The DSR has effectively engaged support from A&S, SGS, and the wider University to strengthen strategies to address harassment and improve respectful communication, as well as support for student mental health and wellness. The DSR has taken several interconnected steps to ensure that faculty and staff work together to ensure clear, accessible communication about mental health supports in the university; that faculty and students are very aware of their shared responsibility to communicate regularly about a student's program in a manner that is supportive and professional; and that students know where to turn for support when they need it. Concretely, these include: the 2021 departmental development of the [DSR Best Practices in Graduate Supervision](#), with guidance from the SGS Vice-Dean of Students and the FAS Director of HR,FSMH; a 2021 DSR workshop led by the FAS Director of HR,FSMH on "Navigating Concerns and Complaints" for the faculty administrators and student leaders; the [2020 ADE Action Plan](#) and the resulting Committee, which regularly hosts open meetings for the entire department, some of which have focused on mental health, including with presentations from students. In addition, the Faculty's Vice-Dean, Graduate Education and the Director of HR,FSMH led a discussion for faculty about graduate student mental health and supervisory practices at the DSR meeting in February 2022.

The DSR has also instituted a number of recent initiatives designed to support student well-being, which will continue to be offered for the foreseeable future. For instance, in 2020 the DSR created a "Grad Teaching Liaison" – a faculty member available for conversations with all graduate students about their teaching experiences and goals. As this is a relatively new position, its impact on student wellness may not have been realized at the time of the external review. The Department has also reconstituted the Graduate Professionalization Committee and renamed it the Graduate Experience & Progress Committee, with active graduate student participation and a renewed focus on supporting graduate students to navigate academia. Third, the DSR is developing a communications plan to ensure students and faculty know where to turn for support, including a "Who to Ask" document, and a revamped Graduate Student Handbook. Finally, the Faculty of Arts & Science's Mental Health & Wellness Office will be offering a graduate student workshop on "Having Difficult Conversations" this term, and will be invited again in the future.

The reviewers echoed the recommendation from the previous review to regularly assess faculty service expectations, particularly to avoid over-burdening jointly appointed junior faculty members.

Immediate-term response: The DSR Workload Policy has been revised and now spells out more clearly the service expectations for junior faculty.

Medium-term response: The Chair will continue to follow the required process of consultation on service and teaching between relevant Chairs and jointly appointed faculty members.

The reviewers commented on the DSR’s fruitful relationships with cognate departments and noted that additional interdisciplinary collaboration may help attract students to the study of religion; they also observed that “*there are clear opportunities for improving coordination and collaboration among the faculty and students at different campuses.*”

Immediate-term response: The DSR appreciates the reviewers’ acknowledgement of the many rich and fruitful relationships it enjoys with cognate units. The Department continues to explore new relationships and nurture existing ones, both within and across campuses.

The Dean’s office will monitor the implementation of recommendations through ongoing meetings with the Chair, as well as the A&S unit-level planning process. A brief report to the Office of the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs, midway between the June 2-3, 2021, site visit and the year of the next site visit, will be prepared.

The year of the next review will be no later than the 2028-29 review cycle.

To conclude, we appreciate that the external reviewers identified the DSR’s strengths and noted a few areas for development. The DSR has already begun to move forward with plans to address the recommendations as presented by the reviewers.

Sincerely,



Melanie Woodin
Dean, Faculty of Arts & Science
Professor, Department of Cell & Systems Biology

cc.

Pamela Klassen, Chair, Department for the Study of Religion, Faculty of Arts & Science
Gillian Hamilton, Acting Vice-Dean, Academic Planning, Faculty of Arts & Science
Daniella Mallinck, Director, Academic Programs, Planning & Quality Assurance, Office of the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs
Andrea Benoit, Academic Review Officer, Office of the Dean, Faculty of Arts and Science

3. Committee on Academic Policy & Programs (AP&P) Findings

The spokesperson for the reading group reported that the review summary accurately described the full review and that overall, they had found the review to be positive. The reading group reported that the Dean's administrative response had adequately addressed issues identified by the review, however, asked the Department to further comment on the topic of harassment and mental wellness found in the report.

Dean Woodin commented on the processes in place that addressed formal and informal complaints of harassment and situations of discomfort by students in accordance with best practice and University policies.

Professor Pamela Klassen, Chair of the Department of Religion, further commented on the Department's response to addressing harassment and the resources available to students who had experienced harassment. She complimented the new Centre for Graduate Supervision for its assistance with training and conveying expectations for faculty graduate mentorship and supervision.

No follow-up report was requested.

4. Institutional Executive Summary

The reviewers praised the department as "outstanding," and one of the best departments in North America, with impressive strengths in faculty research, graduate student training and undergraduate teaching, an exemplary multi-disciplinary approach, and faculty keenly attuned to the current state of the discipline; they noted numerous initiatives developed to address undergraduate enrolment challenges, positive recent curricular changes in graduate programs, a Professionalization Seminar, and a recent initiative to create pooled fund for student support from faculty grants; they applauded the Anti-Racism, Decolonization, and Equity Action Plan and recent efforts to diversify the faculty complement; they noted the energetic new leadership, numerous positive joint faculty appointments, and strong relationships with cognate programs; finally, the reviewers lauded the DSR's efforts to create more opportunities for enhanced global engagement through partnerships with international universities. The reviewers recommended that the following issues be addressed: considering changes to the structure of the undergraduate programs, such as adopting a stream model within a single "Religion" program; improving communication regarding research opportunities for undergraduate students; addressing concerns around the means of assessing graduate students' language competency; exploring ways to address funding concerns for graduate students; broadening access to grant writing workshops for graduate students; establishing immediate and long-term strategies for responding to reports of harassment within the Department, and for communicating with students regarding available mental health and wellness supports; regularly assessing faculty service expectations; and further strengthening fruitful interdisciplinary collaboration with cognate units across the three campuses.

The Dean's Administrative Response describes the Division, unit and programs' responses to the reviewers' recommendations, including an implementation plan for any changes necessary as a result.

5. Monitoring and Date of Next Review

The Dean's office will monitor the implementation of recommendations through ongoing meetings with the Chair, as well as the A&S Unit-Level Academic Planning process. A brief report to the Office of the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs on the status of the implementation plans will be prepared midway between the June 2021 site visit and the year of the next site visit.

The next review will be commissioned no later than the 2028-29 review cycle.

6. Distribution

On June 29, 2022, the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan was posted to the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs website and the link provided by email to the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science, the Secretaries of AP&P, Academic Board and Governing Council, and the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance. The Dean provided the link to the Chair of the Unit.