



**SOUTH DAKOTA BOARD OF REGENTS
ACADEMIC AFFAIRS FORMS**

**Institutional Program Review
Report to the Board of Regents**

Use this form to submit a program review report to the system Chief Academic Officer. Complete this form for all units/programs undergoing an accreditation review, nationally recognized review process, or institutional program review. The report is due 30 days following receipt of the external and internal review reports.

UNIVERSITY:	SDSU
DEPARTMENT OR SCHOOL:	History, Political Science, Philosophy and Religion
PROGRAM REVIEWED:	Philosophy and Religion
DATE OF REVIEW:	3/13/2017
TYPE OF REVIEW:	Institutional Program Review

University Approval

To the Board of Regents and the Executive Director: I certify that I have read this report, that I believe it to be accurate, and that it has been evaluated and approved as provided by university policy.

President of the University

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8-2-2017

Date

1. Identify the program reviewers and any external accrediting body:

Charlene P.E. Burns, Ph.D., Professor of Religion and Department Chair Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, External Reviewer

Matt Miller, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Chemistry, Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, South Dakota State University, Brookings, SD, Internal Reviewer

2. Items A & B should address the following issues: mission centrality, program quality, cost, program productivity, plans for the future, and assessment of progress.

2(A). Describe the strengths and weaknesses identified by the reviewers

According to the reviewer, the greatest strength of the program is its dedicated teaching staff. Additional strengths include offering a number of courses regularly in the online environment, faculty with creative ideas for enhancing the programs (ex., plans for an Ethics Lab), and willingness on the part of faculty to engage in study abroad opportunities with students. A very important strength is student perception: the students with whom I met were highly complementary of the PHIL/RELS faculty. They expressed respect and appreciation for the faculty's willingness to work with them and to be available to help in working through issues related to timely graduation.

The limitations identified by the reviewer include inadequate staffing for the offering of strong minors in Philosophy and Religious Studies. A near-exclusive focus on Western monotheism in the RELS curriculum. Lack of some very important foundational courses in the PHIL curriculum. Few electives on offer for either minor. No cap on enrolments in online offerings. A general perception that there is a lack of substantial support for the program minors. Perceptions that administration of the department has become more top-down, with some decisions potentially resulting in loss of disciplinary integrity.

2(B). Briefly summarize the review recommendations

1. Discontinue the no-cap-for-online offerings practice.
2. Invest in the RELS and PHIL minors by allowing upper division courses to run with low enrollments for the next three to four years in order to "grow" the minors.
3. Create a new faculty position in Islamic Studies and develop the position description to include the ability to teach world religions.
4. College planning for a new Diversity Studies program and the new course, A&S 111: Global Citizenship in a Multicultural Society, should include Religious Studies at all stages of the process.
5. Consider using dollars earned through teaching the Bioethics course to help fund hiring of additional part-time staff to teach courses attractive to science majors like Religions and Science, Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of Mind/Artificial Intelligence, etc.

6. Market the minors on their greatest strengths, which include the expertise of staff and the outcomes these courses can help students achieve.
7. Encourage faculty to become more intentional in drawing connections between course content and “the real world”.
8. Rename current courses with more attention-grabbing titles and develop new courses for the minors that capitalize on the strengths of your excellent and interdisciplinary faculty.
9. Religious Studies: Consider elimination of RELS 213 Intro to Religion and incorporate a short overview of methods at the start of the RELS 250 World Religions course.
10. Develop a capstone course for each minor in which students are guided through the research and writing of a paper appropriate to the disciplines. See next recommendation regarding plans for a writing course.
11. Reconsider the plans to develop a discipline-specific writing course and rather incorporate guidance in research and writing in the upper division courses.
12. Aim to improve transparency and open communication among all members of the department.

2(C). Indicate the present and continuous actions to be taken by the college or department to address the issues raised by the review. What outcomes are anticipated as a result of these actions?

1. Before the site visit, it was decided by the program and department to discontinue the no-cap for online courses.
2. If what is meant by low enrollments is less than ten, I do not think the suggestion is feasible. University policy prohibits running classes with less than ten students, except in very special circumstances. This means we as a department must continue to experiment with creative approaches of ensuring upper division classes have healthy enrollment. Having courses serving multiple programs has been very successful and is now, I believe, widely embraced by faculty in all programs. Not only does it solve enrollment issues, but it also provides all programs with a greater selection of offerings. This approach, though, cannot be used for minor-specific courses, which still makes them vulnerable to cancellation.

A second option is to develop a new market for the upper division classes. Philosophy has been very successful in attracting programs that see ethics as essential to their profession. Bioethics (PHIL 383) and Social/ Ethical Aspects of Information (INFO 102) each bring student credit hours from other colleges. The largest service that Religion can provide the University, besides providing a minor and offering General Education courses, is helping SDSU raise its NSSE scores in the area of exposure to diverse viewpoints. In the History program, one of our six upper division elective courses must be a designated diversity-intensive course. For the past two years it has worked very well. If the model was applied to the College-level, I think it would likewise be successful. The College of Arts and Sciences requires 33 credits of upper division. Most majors only require about 21 credits, leaving a 12 credit hole/ opportunity. Thus, such a requirement would not harm timely graduation, it would give our students invaluable exposure at the upper-division level to issues confronting religious/ racial minorities and it would not require new hires. Instead, the proposal would simply fully utilize our existing experts. Religion is uniquely suited to help fill that need.

3. / 4. I would agree with the reviewer, and an Islamist should be near the top of the Department's list. That hire would have to serve as an expert for many fields, including religion, politics, history, geography and global studies. The move to schools will help to create more strategic opportunities for allocating resources to make that happen. In my opinion, though, the first priority should lie with the University's vision of dedicating resources to tribal outreach and American Indian Studies. If we do that, our departmental will have a more realistic chance of expanding its market, staffing and resources if it aligns itself with the University's goals. As of spring 2017, we were successful in recruiting and hiring for the next year, and possibly beyond, two scholars of American Indian spirituality and gender issues. In our post site-visit meeting with the program, we looked at the possibility of finding an Islamist to teach online solely during the summer. However imperfect, it would fill a huge gap in the University's course offerings, it would not compete with tenure-track upper division offerings during the academic year and would pay for itself by additional summer enrollment.
5. / 6. While revenue from program fees should be dedicated to that class, Bioethics, the Philosophy program has devised an excellent proposal to put forth an Ethics Lab. In this, students would be paid to assist in research and experiments. Every program needs a hook to get students excited. The Ethics Lab will be that for Philosophy. I have asked Greg Peterson to get me as many details as soon as possible so I can begin to draft marketing literature.
7. Recommendation 7 is an excellent suggestion for the faculty.
8. Marketing classes with interesting names is good advice for the upper-division courses. Because most of the lower division courses are common within the BOR and they are attached to SGRs, changing those names would be problematic.

9. / 10. / 11. I generally favor greater intentionality in programs, and the suggestions above would certainly give that. If the faculty were in favor, I would fully support it. I would also understand if the faculty were reluctant, given the problems getting minor-specific courses to make enrollment. The problem is only exacerbated if the course seems onerous. The suggestion of embedding those skills into pre-existing upper division courses might be a more practical solution.
12. I would agree that clear communication is vital. However, face-to-face departmental meetings can be very time consuming and so there must be a balance between time spent and communication. The faculty decided in the bylaws that they want a minimum of three department meetings a semester, but much more than that takes away from teaching and research. Every department has a faculty representative on the College Faculty Council to help with lateral communication with the faculty. Next year, department meetings will be scheduled just after the College Faculty Council meetings to assist our representative with departmental communication.

Corrections to Dr. Burns' Site Visit Report:

It was mentioned in the site visit report that the Religion curriculum came from me. To correct the record, I leave a program's curriculum solely up to the program. Associate Vice President-Academic Affairs, Mary Kay Helling, had requested in 2014 that the Religion program develop student learning outcomes for the 2015 catalog. Because these outcomes were developed so long ago, the faculty member in their meeting with Dr. Burns simply did not recall the process and assumed I developed them independently. However, an email from the time (attached) shows the SLOs came from the program, not the department head.

The other minor point related to a comment on methods of communication. Decisions with gravity are always communicated face to face, usually accompanied by an email for record-sake. The one exception was when several adjuncts were not permitted to keep their fall classes back in 2014. The request came from Dean Dennis Papini and he asked that it be done at once. It was three weeks before my start date in early June, I was not living in Brookings at the time, and all the faculty were off contract – so a face-to-face meeting was not possible. I did, however, invite those who wished to talk about it with me to meet once I arrived in late June and several did. This instance was an exceptional situation and does not reflect my usual way of interacting with the faculty.