

May 30, 2018

**PROFESSOR BABAK RAHIMI, Director
Program for the Study of Religion**

SUBJECT: Undergraduate Program Review for the Program for the Study of Religion

Dear Professor Rahimi,

The Undergraduate Council discussed the Program for the Study of Religion's 2018 Undergraduate Program Review. The Council supports the findings and recommendations of the review subcommittee and appreciates the thoughtful and proactive response from the Program. The Council makes the following recommendations:

1. The Program should continue exploring the steps needed to join the Institute of Arts and Humanities.
2. To address a shortage in faculty who teach specific courses for the Program, the Program should explore the "Faculty Recall Policy" to see if they can hire faculty this way.
3. The Program should encourage existing affiliated faculty participation, specifically, in teaching courses for the Program, and in the Program's social and educational events.

The Council will conduct its follow-up review of the Program in Spring 2019. At that time, our goal is to learn about the Program's progress in implementing the recommendations of the program review subcommittee and the Undergraduate Council. The Council extends its thanks to the Program for their engagement in this process and we look forward to the continued discussion.

Sincerely,

Sam Rickless, Chair
Undergraduate Council

Attachment

(1) Undergraduate Program Review Report and Responses for the Program for the Study of Religion

cc: F. Ackerman
J. Eggers
R. Horwitz
J. Moore
C. Della Coletta
R. Rodriguez
M. Sidney

Undergraduate Program Review
Program for the Study of Religion
March 2, 2018

The review committee read documentation about the program, including the self-assessment, faculty, enrollment data, and student exit surveys. We met in person with the core faculty and the PSR staff, affiliated faculty from anthropology department, an undergraduate major and an undergraduate minor, the MSO of the Literature Department, the divisional dean, the and the assistant dean of undergraduate education. Program for the Study of Religion (PSR), which exists only as an undergraduate major and minor, is a valuable part of our university's offerings.

A. Administrative structure, faculty composition, and enrollments

The PSR consists of a core faculty of three, all with their FTE housed in the Literature Department, although their training is in the study of religions. The administrative structure of the Program for the Study of Religion includes a faculty director, two additional core faculty, and PSR staff. The faculty director oversees the general administration of this interdisciplinary program. Three faculty have in the past jointly worked out teaching assignments discussed issues regarding the program, advised and mentored students. One of the key challenges for the program is that one of the three core faculty is retiring in 2018, and another of the three faculty has been increasingly disengaged during this last review period.

The dean of Arts and Humanities funds one lecturer course per year. Depending upon course content, it is sometimes taught as RELI and sometimes within the Department of Literature, the latter as a courtesy to the PSR's host department. The PSR only teaches one course that uses a Teaching Assistant, RELI 1, Introduction to Religion. Because the PSR is only an undergraduate program, the TA is chosen from among the qualified graduate students belonging to affiliate departments. If new FTE tenure-track position is approved by the dean of Arts and Humanities in the coming years, the PSR expects the future core faculty to be based at the Department of Literature. Non-Literature faculty are invited to teach courses in PSR, and the current director is evaluating possible strategies to incentivise teaching by faculty from other departments that relate to PSR.

A total of 48 affiliated faculty contribute regularly about twenty elective courses per year; these are courses which they would be teaching anyway but which are designated as satisfying the PSR requirements. The staff person updates the program website every quarter with a list of available courses. The bulk of affiliated faculty come roughly evenly from Literature, History, and Anthropology or Sociology; others are drawn from Philosophy, Visual Arts, Political Science and Communications. The result is a varied array of courses for students to take. Undergraduate students mentioned that during the last period, there has been spotty coverage of courses relevant to their major, and that it has been increasingly challenging to find suitable courses.

There is one 50% staff person who is absolutely critical to the functioning of the program: she identifies and lists the courses offered every quarter, maintains and updates the information on the program's website, maintains contact with the affiliated faculty, regularly contacts students both within and beyond the program to make them aware of program events and of information about the major and minor, attends transfer and admission events to represent the PSR, and functions as an advisor to students. Undergraduate students and faculty have uniformly spoken very highly of the PSR staff person.

The number students completing a PSR major has varied from 3 to 13 over the last 5 years, with 41 total students with PSR major degree. The number of completing minor 3-9; for a total of 25 in the last 5 years. The PSR believes that the reason for the enrollment decline is the lack of PSR's visibility, and the expectation of UCSD students to finish in four years that has impacted students ability to select PSR, as most become majors and minors in their junior or senior years. The Program Review Committee agrees with this explanation, but also notes that another reason for the enrollment decline is the lack of effective leadership in PSR between 2013 and 2017. The Program Review Committee also agrees with PSR that the diversity of choices in religious studies is the key to their future success. This would be achieved by offering diverse upper-division courses taught by faculty from diverse departments across the Humanities and Social Sciences. Program majors and minors are encouraged to study abroad, and are permitted to use credits from overseas classes towards their degree.

PSR students are encouraged to speak to any (or all) of the core faculty for advice vis-à-vis their academic programs, the intellectual content of the major and minor, career possibilities, graduate school possibilities, and the like. One of the key benefits of PSR that is consistently mentioned by the undergraduate majors and minors is the availability and ease of access to faculty, and the quality of their mentorship.

The PSR's grade distribution skews slightly higher than the general Arts and Humanities, which as a whole gives higher grades than the campus at large. Students self report as learning more in PSR classes in comparison to the campus at large while studying less. Most students major and minor in religion, or enroll in its classes, because they are genuinely interested in the subject matter. Though many also take religion, especially religion 101, to fulfill college-writing requirements, they choose religion from variety of course options provided on campus.

Students and faculty are uniformly concerned about the lack of PSR's visibility on campus. The undergraduates even mentioned that the program is not listed in UCSD pamphlet that is given to incoming students with a list of all majors and minors. Clearly more should be done to make the program more visible on campus. The PSR makes an active attempt to advise transfer students before they matriculate at UC San Diego. They set up a table at the Transfer Admit Day in May, and contact transfer students upon their admittance. PSR has also organized Faculty Advisor for Convivial Events (FACE) program in which a core-faculty member invites majors and minors to dinner and the movies, mostly in spring Quarters. PSR courses could be used more frequently to meet GE requirements in UCSD's colleges. This would increase

visibility of the program on campus, but requires of PSR to coordinate with the colleges. The PSR can also better utilize their own students and social media for outreach.

B. Quality of the faculty and curriculum

The quality of the core faculty is extremely high. All are productive scholars publishing with respected journals and presses, and excellent teachers, with one of the core faculty having some less than favorable reviews in recent years. Affiliated faculty are equally high quality from several different departments in the humanities and social sciences. They are from the departments of literature, history, anthropology, sociology, and philosophy. Our sense of student enthusiasm for the faculty was confirmed by exit surveys, our student interviews, teaching evaluations, and the fact that lower-division teaching by the core faculty generates student excitement and interest in the program.

The study of religion focuses on a set of problems, questions, and frames for intellectual attention about how human beings inhabit their social and cultural worlds in relation to beliefs and practices concerning supramundane intelligences and powers. The program's grounding principle is that the phenomena we classify as "religious" phenomena are, for all times and places, to be treated as integrally human phenomena. The conception of the program is cutting edge in its interdisciplinarity and aligns with an American Academy of Religion (AAR) report (2008) on the shift of the field away from Christian theology towards a global range of different religious traditions and a more theory-based understanding of religion as a phenomenon linked to nearly every aspect of human experience. UC San Diego's Program for the Study of Religion agrees with AAR on the essential salience of the key pedagogical norms: intercultural learning, exploring big questions, thinking critically, writing critically, considering moral questions, and applying these skills to global contexts and lived behaviors.

The 2009 PSR's Inventory of Education Effectiveness Indicators was authored in response to a request made by Office of the Associate Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Education. Over the past nine years, there have been no significant changes in the program's personnel, educational philosophy, requirements, or pedagogical practices that would demand a significant change in the program's WASC Inventory. Overall, the structure of the major is academically sound, offering students a firm grounding in the study of religion, both in terms of its complexity and its relationship to other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences.

There are two required courses: RELI 101, "Tools and methods in study of religion", and RELI 189, "Seminar in Religion." The content of each of these courses can change with the expertise of the faculty teaching it, enabling the core faculty to take turns. The first is a popular course, drawing students of varying backgrounds and interests across the campus, including STEM majors. It also serves as a "gateway" course for the major. RELI 189 is designed as a seminar for majors only, providing them with a focussed research opportunity to work with a faculty member. The interdisciplinarity similarly connects with students from widely different second majors, and the exit surveys indicate a broad array of options pursued after graduation.

Majors are required to take twelve courses (48 units), minors to take seven, all for a letter grade: in both cases, a combination of core courses taught by faculty for the PSR, and elective courses taught within the ten academic units currently affiliated with the PSR. All minors and majors take RELI 101: Tools and Methods in the Study of Religion. The major and minor programs, however, differ in two broad ways. Majors must take seminar requirement, RELI 189, and four courses must satisfy distribution requirements. All majors must also take at least two upper division courses within the Division of Arts & Humanities, as well as two upper division courses within the Division of Social Sciences. All minors must take at least one upper division course within the Division of Arts & Humanities, as well as one upper division course within the Division of Social Sciences. The PSR's core courses fall into three rubrics: "Core Requirement" (8 units), Arts and Humanities Requirement (8 units), Social Science Requirement (8 units), Single-tradition Requirement and Upper-division electives (16 units). Students may choose to pursue the Study of Religion as their second major, and there is also an Honors Program with two quarters of research and writing.

The program might consider getting more of their current courses recognized as fulfilling the DEI requirement. This is preferable to trying to create new courses in the short term due to the small number of the core faculty in the program.

Although the PSR does not have a lower division requirement, it does participate in lower-division instruction with RELI 1, Introduction to Religion, and RELI 2, Introduction to the comparative study of religion, focusing on religious traditions of global significance. The PSR is not able to offer freshman seminars on a predictable or regular basis. No freshman seminar was offered during the period under review.

Students are happy with the nature and flexibility of the program, which enables them to combine it often with another major and nonetheless to complete their degree in slightly less time than the campus average. They tend to undertake this major for reasons of intellectual interest and personal development rather than for career objectives. Grades in PSR courses are slightly higher than (but not out of line from) the campus.

C. Campus policies and campus context

Our university climate, defined by emphasis on STEM fields, places pressure on programs and departments in the Humanities and on PSR in particular, both with respect to size and resources. The study of religion in a public university is not a matter of separation between church and state, because the field concerns study of the overall role of religion in human life and not promulgation of confessional beliefs or theological principles. Indeed, within the UC system both UCSB and UCR have successful departments of Religion. If UC San Diego is to continue to be a research university in the full sense, development of the academic study of religion is one of the fields that cannot be neglected. This is all the more the case insofar as one of our most eminent climate scientists, Professor Ramanathan, has been in direct dialogue

with Pope Francis on issues of climate change -- the university climate can only benefit by having a well developed unit where reflection on the relation between science and religion could be an important pedagogical and scholarly theme. Indeed, students interviewed by the committee stated explicitly that STEM students experience Religion courses as “a breath of fresh air” and an opportunity to reflect on the nature of human experience and existential values.

The absence of any lower division requirements makes the major readily accessible to transfer students and makes it possible for both transfer students and students who come into the program late in their undergraduate studies to complete a major in a timely manner. On the downside, the lack of any lower division course articulation with other colleges adds to the invisibility of the program to students. Another visibility problem is caused by the Registrar program’s inability to cross-list courses visibly in the schedule of classes. This creates a problem for a program which depends heavily on such cross-listing. Students registering for courses do not see that these courses might count towards a major or minor in PSR.

Policies regarding educational use of enrollment generated funds are not clear. It appears that in the past such funds were used to support operational and programmatic activities with an educational purpose, though more recently that educational use pertains only to funding TAs and lecturers. This should be clarified so that the PSR has maximum flexibility to support student-centered programmatic activities.

The PSR faculty reports difficulties applying for lecturers support online insofar as the Literature Department’s website does not include a dedicated category for religion courses as it does for other thematic areas and specialties within the department. This is a simple technological fix.

Some means should be specified to incentivize FTE Affiliated Faculty to teach courses for the PSR under the RELI rubric, perhaps by providing a mentoring fund to promote educational activities or support student research training.

University policy emphasizing a four year time to degree may have an impact on decreasing numbers of majors because of the large number of double majors in this field. Students may feel pressure to downgrade their second major in Religion to a minor or not participate in the Program at all.

The university’s Pathways to Retirement program policy is that teaching recall is possible if the retiring faculty member is 60 years old or more. One of the core professors planned retirement includes a petition for permission to be recalled even though he is not yet 60, in order to continue teaching in support of the PSR. The petition has been denied, but it is worth revisiting this issue given the small size of the core faculty complement.

D. Recommendations

On the whole this is a valuable program that should continue offering its major and minor to enthusiastic students. The flexibility of the program also allows it to work well for a wide diversity of students and to enable them to finish their degree requirements in good time. PSR is positioned to draw together Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences and STEM into fruitful interactions. Design of undergraduate curriculum well reflects the national standards as written by American Academy of Religion.

Recommendations:

1. The PSR should increase the number of majors and minors. This enrollment weakness in the program could largely be improved by better outreach across the campus. Two PSR faculty have devoted much time and energy to this, but they should also recruit current majors to initiate peer-to-peer outreach using social media, campus events, tabling, and distributing fliers. They might also be motivated to produce short videos. Another major initiative would be to reach out and engage all six of the campus's colleges to explore ways by which PSR courses could fulfill their general education requirements and have them listed as such in advising literature. Currently only one or two colleges do this. This could be a task undertaken by the Program Coordinator and Undergraduate Advisor at the direction of the PSR Director. Thirdly, PSR should explore ways to increase and regularize the number of courses taught by faculty affiliates. This would be incentivized by offering research or mentoring stipends to them and by possibly offering the department replacement funds. Lastly, the PSR should ensure that their major and minor are clearly listed in all UCSD literature, and that they are well represented in on-campus events targeted at incoming students and their families.
2. Core Faculty of the PSR needs to be rebuilt.
 - a. Given the need to reinforce the currently small complement of FTE faculty, we recommend that the Program Director immediately engage the Literature Department Chair to discuss 1) the impending retirement of one of the core faculty members, 2) the longer term growth of core faculty from three to four members. In the immediate short term it could be of value to explore opportunities that exist on campus to leverage a spousal hire with relevant expertise.
 - b. Even with the hiring of core faculty, the complement will remain small and PSR requires increased engagement by affiliated faculty beyond the Department of Literature. This could be done, for example, by soliciting more religion electives, providing incentives for affiliated faculty to teach electives under the RELI designation, and including affiliated faculty in academic and social events sponsored by the Program.
3. The PSR should consider joining the Institute of Arts and Humanities (IAH). The arts and humanities concern themselves with the entire record of human experience, of which religion is a key component. On the other hand, the Study of Religion is focused on a subject matter that many scholars in the arts, humanities, sciences, and social

sciences consider to be an intrinsic dimension of humanity—religion. Incorporating PSR under IAH would clearly create a relationship that would be mutually beneficial, where PSR would provide the much needed component of religious studies, while IAH would enable PSR to expand and flourish by making it more visible and be able to more easily engage with related disciplines. This move would also provide for a more organic growth in areas that are both relevant and appealing to the student body, such as developing programs related to religion of the border, science and religion, religion of mortality (a topic that has attracted more than 500 students to a similar course at UCSB) and other related topics. Furthermore, PSR, as a part of IAH, could, through collaboration with other programs in IAH, reach students interested in indigenous, new and non-western religions, and better address issues related to diversity, equity and inclusion. Lastly, this move would enable much better visibility of the program, and would enable both PSR and IAH to better leverage financial and staff support resources. PSR currently has 50% time staff dedicated to the program that could also become a part of IAH, and has currently more than sufficient funding for PSR's continuing operation assuming that the dean's office and the department clarify how and when the funds that are available to the program can be used.

In summary, the review committee would like to congratulate the PSR for doing such an outstanding job of teaching and mentoring their students even during this difficult period, and hopes that by addressing some of the current issues, the program will continue to flourish and contribute to the university as a whole.

Review Committee

Professor and Program Review Chair Tajana Rosing, UC San Diego

Professor Thomas Csordas, UC San Diego

Professor Juan Campo, UC Santa Barbara