

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Academic Program Review
Theology and Religious Studies

EXTERNAL REVIEWERS

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The review team read the self-study written by the faculty in the department; reviewed the curriculum, course syllabi and evaluations; conducted class visits; interviewed students, faculty and staff; and met with the Dean, Associate Dean, and other relevant members of the campus community. Prior to their visit, the reviewers were provided with USF's Vision, Mission, Values Statement, the department's self-study, and other university materials.

1. How did the external review committee rate the quality of the program- excellent, very good, good, adequate, or poor? How does the program compare with benchmark top-tier programs nationally? Please provide a brief rationale for the external review committee's rating.
 - The reviewers noted the department's "evident concern for the integral well-being of students" and also said the department "is fortunate to have excellent faculty in both fields [Theology and Religious Studies]."
 - The reviewers claimed that the department "shares goals characteristic of many Jesuit colleges and universities around the country. The department, however, would do well to be in closer conversation with these institutions."
 - The reviewers insisted—with marked consistency—that the department needs to move toward integration, both in terms of its mission/vision and in particular, its curriculum (both graduate and undergraduate).
 - Along curricular lines, the reviewers said that the department "should constantly remind itself that its Core courses, while in the main functioning as 'service' courses that address the needs of students across the university, are far more than this." They are, for example, potential draws into a Theology and Religious Studies major or minor for students and also that the department "should work to staff its Core courses with particularly able and dynamic teachers, as well as helping its good teachers to become better teachers."
 - The reviewers did not compare the department to benchmark institutions, but they did, repeatedly, suggest that the department look at how other institutions deal with the theology/religious studies dialogue.
 - Most notably, the reviewers posited, "in order for the Department to achieve a stellar reputation as a leading program among peer departments in the United States, it is absolutely essential that faculty take more of an active role in shaping the future of the Department."
 - Overall, the reviewers seemed to suggest that there is profound potential in the department if the faculty can move beyond pedagogical, interpersonal and disciplinary tensions.

2. What are the most important general issues that emerged from the external review process?
 - *Curriculum*: The curriculum needs to be overhauled, creating one major.
 - *Outcomes*: Learning outcomes are outdated and too numerous.
 - *Religious Studies/Theology*: The perceived "split" between the two is hurting the department, withering morale, and inhibiting curricular creativity

- *M.A. Program:* The viability of the MA program and how it's staffed demands attention
 - *Core:* The core courses the department offers need to be engaging, broader, more inclusive and dynamic
 - *Chair/s:* A new chair or co-chairs be elected to work on building (and fixing) the program
 - *Committees:* Standing committees need to be established to remedy and attend to the major issues facing the department
 - *Advising:* Students note unhappiness with advising
3. What specific recommendations for improving the program's quality has the external review committee made to the Dean?
- a. The reviewers recommend that the Department cease to offer two separate majors and instead collapse its offerings into one, and research how other Catholic and Jesuit Departments have bridged the perceived gap between Theology and Religious Studies. 4
 - b. The reviewers recommend that by patient conversation the Department learn to emphasize the ways in which Theology and Religious Studies can cohere in faculty research and teaching, and consequently in the education of undergraduate and graduate students. In order to achieve this goal of envisioning how Theology and Religious Studies as disciplines might complement one another as part of a coherent whole, the Department should examine carefully how other Catholic and Jesuit institutions negotiate the "Theology" - "Religious Studies" issue that the Department seems to see in terms of impasse. 4
 - c. They suggest that the Department commit itself to revising its learning outcomes and revisiting them with the goal of ensuring that courses identified by the Department as part of both its "Theology" and "Religious Studies" curricula be able to serve in fulfillment and that they be much shorter—like other departments. Similarly, they recommend that the Department develop outcomes that reflect only whatever consensus it can come to, prior to any additional conversations that occur thereafter with others outside the Department. 4
 - d. The reviewers suggest that the Department engage in much long-term planning about its undergraduate curriculum, and attend more to the scheduling of its overall undergraduate curricular offerings, working to make sure faculty are not offering courses on similar topics in the same semester or at the same time or both, and also structuring a curriculum that allows students to build on their previous work from semester to semester as they move through the major. 4
 - e. They want the Department to commit itself to teaching Core courses that are particularly dynamic – e.g., courses that are pedagogically engaging and compellingly structured – with the goal of enticing students to take further elective courses in the Department and also to become majors and minors. 4
 - f. They also suggest that a chair or co-chairs be appointed that will oversee the Department in its entirety with an eye toward building the program. They recommend a serious examination of the M.A. program and its viability, addressing the "inequity" of staffing between theology and religious studies. 4
 - g. They want senior faculty members and the Dean to mentor younger faculty, particularly in the pre-tenure years, to aid them in using their time wisely in the pre-tenure years, and to encourage them in preparing papers for scholarly conferences and then publishing them. 4
 - h. They suggest that the Department establish standing committees with faculty oversight in the following areas: courses and curriculum, student recruitment and advising, and extra-curricular/social activities. 4

They suggest that the engagement, energy and openness that accompanies the more popular classes in "religious studies" be generated in the "theology" classes, though with a new curriculum, that distinction may be less apparent. *

4 *Completed* * *Ongoing* @ *Underway* # *Under Consideration*

4. In the opinion of the external review committee is the program following the University's strategic initiatives in that it is:
 - a. Recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty of outstanding teachers and scholars:
 - The reviewers note the strong and impressive faculty
 - They acknowledge a dedication to students and program
 - The diversity of the department is impressive
 - b. Enrolling, supporting and graduating a diverse student body that demonstrates high academic achievement, strong leadership capabilities, a concern for others, and a sense of responsibility for the weak and vulnerable:
 - The reviewers cite "evident concern for the integral well-being of students"
 - "Department members seem well aware of the mutual implications of academic study and religious faith and practice, and they are sensitive to how academic study and the religious self-understanding of students interact, sometimes raising questions that will be inevitably difficult for some students."
 - "The Department is concerned about these dynamics and the personal issues students face."
 - c. Providing the environment necessary to promote student learning in the program:
 - The reviewers would say that this area needs attention, as the curriculum, the intellectual climate, and the spirit of collaboration that should drive a department like this is depleting departmental energy and resources.
 - The reviewers acknowledge the devotion of faculty to teaching and research, but time and time again, they note how collaboration and cooperation are essential for this department to flourish.

5. In what way is the program contributing to the goal of making the University of San Francisco a premier Jesuit Catholic urban university with a global perspective that educates leaders who will fashion a more humane and just world?
 - The reviewers note sensitivity toward students and a deep understanding of the role of religion, faith and spirituality in academic and non-academic settings.
 - The reviewers note and encourage a climate of diversity, inclusion, and openness regarding all faith traditions.

6. What is the timetable for the response to the external review committee's recommendations for program improvement? What can the AVP's office do to appropriately respond to the review?
 - The AVP's office can support the department's movement toward integration, collaboration and inclusiveness. The reviewers noted *repeatedly* that the apparent division between theology and religious studies is a false divide that undermines the department and the university. The administration can be most helpful by supporting a vision and curriculum of integration.

7. What general comments or issues, if any, are crucial to understanding the reviewers' report?

Two members of the review team are Jesuits.

The reviewers come from major institutions, known for their intellectual rigor and balance (Dartmouth College, Swarthmore College, University of Virginia and Boston College). Their comments, then, should be taken as objective, insightful and fair. In other words, there is no evidence that any of the reviewers possessed any sort of polemical agenda.

The reviewers saw three major issues standing in the way of the department achieving its goals and delivering a program commensurate with the mission and vision of USF: a new integrated curriculum that produces one major, an end to the overstated distinction between theology and religious studies, and a new climate of collaboration and cooperation.