

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Academic Program Review
College of Arts and Sciences

DEPARTMENT/PROGRAM

Jewish Studies & Social Justice Minor

EXTERNAL REVIEWERS

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CAMPUS VISIT

November 11 - 12, 2022

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Draft reviewed and approved by: Faculty of the Minor in Jewish Studies & Social Justice and Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences at the University of San Francisco

The review team read the self-study written by faculty in Jewish Studies & Social Justice, reviewed the curriculum, course syllabi and evaluations; interviewed faculty, students 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, 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 external reviewers provided a rating of EXCELLENT for the minor in Jewish Studies & Social Justice. They were “impressed with the excellence demonstrated in the JSSJ program, both by the quality of program developed by the director and assistant director as well as their ability to achieve such high standards in a challenging resource environment.” The reviewers also noted that, “academic excellence, the use of text, *and* independent reasoning to address questions of meaning [are] evident in the work of this program,” which has a “national reputation... as a leading center of both critical inquiry and civic engagement within the academic world.” While the curriculum “differs from traditional Jewish Studies approaches” in the explicit connection to social justice, the reviewers found that “it aligns with levels of quality expected in an undergraduate Jewish Studies program” and that the opportunity for students to enroll in Hebrew and Arabic language courses “not only lift[s] the academic quality of the JSSJ program, but it also offers a powerful symbolic statement to other Jewish Studies programs: comparative approaches to the study of Jews and Judaism, and Israel/Palestine in specific, are critical to understanding the Jewish experience.” They “applaud the JSSJ program leadership for its decision to step away from its original Judaic Studies [designation] and redefine itself along social justice lines” and “believe that strategic move not only offers important insights into the study of Jews, in general, but it simultaneously lifts the academic stature of USF within the larger scholarly world of Jewish Studies.” The reviewers also mentioned that they “left the external review visit with a deep sense of everyone’s commitment, dedication, appreciation, and even passion for the mission and vision of the Jewish Studies & Social Justice program.”

2. What are the most important general issues/challenges that emerged from the external review process?

The issues and challenges identified by the external review team were largely structural in nature. They wrote, “JSSJ has achieved a great deal as a program and is an integral part of USF’s mission, but it could grow even further if more resources were made available. ... Though it is laudable that the faculty and staff of JSSJ grew this program through their own efforts, depending solely on capital raised within the [program] is hindering its further growth.” The external reviewers also cited JSSJ’s linkage to the department of Theology & Religious Studies (THRS), and a lack of curricular independence, as a major challenge to the goals of JSSJ. The close association between JSSJ and THRS, gives the perception of “Judaism as a parallel faith tradition to Christianity. It is not. In order to create internal coherence, as well as more accurately define and teach Jewish Studies, JSSJ needs, in the next five years, to control its academic and educational self-definition.”

3. What specific recommendations for improving the program's quality has the external review committee made to the Dean?

The external reviewers offered three tiers of recommendations to the Dean: urgent, helpful, and ideas for consideration, including:

Urgent:

- Remove JSSJ from THRS and create a JSSJ subject code for courses, thereby, freeing JSSJ to develop authentically.
- Create the Swig Center for Jewish Studies and Social Justice with space on campus where faculty, staff, and students can congregate and work together.
- Devote financial resources to the new Center to support its many programs, faculty, and staff.

Helpful:

- Support development of focused course offerings aligned with the larger changes described above.
- Integrate JSSJ, its faculty, and programs into the larger footprint of the university, leveraging its social justice mission as an opportunity to deepen the Jewish presence on campus.
- Develop partnerships between Bay Area Jewish leaders and philanthropists that center JSSJ as an entry point into a Jesuit university.

Ideas for consideration:

- An urgent issue across all institutions of higher education concerns the inadequacy of faculty pay, especially for non-tenure track faculty. This is also a problem at USF, where the non-tenure track [and part-time] faculty associated with JSSJ are struggling to survive in an expensive area. USF is strongly encouraged to enhance support for its faculty and, therefore, directly benefit academic programs and student experiences.
- Provide public recognition for the university-wide, non-classroom lectures, programs, and activities that JSSJ operates.

4. In the opinion of the external review committee, is the program following the University's strategic initiatives?

The review team found that the program is “doing important, profound work that serves the mission of USF in multiple ways: providing high quality education through classes, public programs, and whole-person student development; promoting interreligious and intercultural engagement, particularly in the context of the Catholic-Jewish relationship; and emphasizing social justice as a public category and personal priority that is central to both Catholic and Jewish teachings.” In terms of pedagogy and course design, the reviewers noted that JSSJ “centers and amplifies the mission statement’s words,” and that “JSSJ thrives at the heart of USF’s mission.”

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?

Throughout the report, the review team detailed ways that JSSJ contributes to USF through course content, faculty expertise, and an overall sense of “dedication to, and realization of, excellence in its undergraduate instruction and student-centered focus on achieving the larger goals of a USF degree.” The reviewers also grappled with the question, “how does Jewish studies fit in a Jesuit University?” They wrote:

There is much about the Jesuit educational mission that not only affirms the role of a Jewish studies program, but actually requires it—a Jewish studies and social justice program, even more so. The emphasis on *cura personalis* and the concomitant affirmation of whole person education is served well by JSSJ’s breadth and depth of course offerings, by its stellar faculty, and by its programs outside the classroom. Academic excellence, the use of text *and* independent reasoning to address questions of meaning, and the assertion that intellectual, emotional, and spiritual work must be linked are also evident in the work of this program. In particular, JSSJ is central to USF’s Jesuit nature because of the Catholic Church’s commitment, since *Nostra Aetate*, to engage with Jews and Judaism. This engagement has developed significantly; initially, Church leaders sought to fight antisemitism and affirm Judaism out of shared values, history, and text. In the past sixty years, though, this approach has evolved into a growing awareness that Judaism must be studied on its own terms, rather than as a tradition merely reflected through Christian lenses. In that vein, scholarship has emerged pointing out the ways that Judaism does not fit neatly into the category of “religion” as it is understood in most Catholic settings. JSSJ, therefore, serves to place USF on the vanguard of Catholic engagement with Judaism.

6. What is the timetable for the response to the external review committee's recommendations for program improvement? What can the Office of the Provost do to appropriately respond to the review?

The next step is for the Dean, Associate Dean, and Associate Director of Assessment to meet with the faculty in JSSJ and discuss the action plan based on the self-study and reviewers' report. Based on the reviewers' suggestions, the Office of the Provost could assist the program by: identifying available resources to support program success, including in the areas of program identity, course development, and physical space.

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

No additional information is necessary to understand the report.