

## Implementation Report for the 2019-2020 Cyclical Review of the Religion and Culture Programs

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**Date:** April 17, 2023

### INTRODUCTION

This is the first implementation report for the cyclical review of the Honours Bachelor of Arts in Religion and Culture and Master of Arts in Religion, Culture and Global Justice in programs that took place in 2019-2020. The full language for each recommendation from the External Reviewers' Report has been included, along with the corresponding information about implementation from the Final Assessment Report. For each recommendation, the unit has provided an update on the progress or action made toward the implementation of that recommendation, followed by comments from the relevant dean(s) and the Program Review Sub-Committee. Taking into account the updates provided by the unit and the comments from the dean(s), the Program Review Sub-Committee will review the report and determine if all recommendations have been implemented satisfactorily or if a subsequent report will be required.

### RECOMMENDATIONS PRIORITIZED FOR IMPLEMENTATION IN FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

<b>Full Recommendation from External Reviewers' Report:</b> Undertake an initiative that would involve a profile-enhancing exercise; the development of a refreshed mission statement that highlights the programs' unique strengths. These materials should be shared with relevant student recruitment and advising units.			
Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)	Responsibility for Implementation	Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)	Anticipated Completion Date
Recommendation #1: Undertake an initiative that would involve a profile-enhancing exercise; the development of a refreshed mission statement that highlights the programs' unique strengths. These materials should be shared with relevant student recruitment and advising units.	Department	N/A	March 2023

**Unit Update:** A mission statement had been completed.

**Arts Decanal Comments:** This remains a work in progress, in particular discussions about how to enhance recruitment. We encourage more direct work with our office in this regard.

**FGPS Decanal Comments:** Once further progress has been achieved on addressing this recommendation, please contact FGPS Communications Coordinator, Jessica Hunt (jeshunt@wlu.ca), who can help to support recruitment efforts.

**Program Review Sub-Committee Comments:** The comments provided by the department suggest that the primary goal of this recommendation (complete a mission statement) has been completed. Therefore, no further updates on this recommendation are required.

<b>Full Recommendation from External Reviewers' Report:</b> Maintain the admission standards currently in place for both undergraduate programs in Religion and Culture and Master in Religion, Culture and Global Justice.			
Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)	Responsibility for Implementation	Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)	Anticipated Completion Date
Recommendation #2: Maintain the admission standards currently in place for both undergraduate programs in Religion and Culture and Master in Religion, Culture and Global Justice.	Department	N/A	Already in place.

**Unit Update:** The department made no modifications to its admission requirements, as was suggested in this recommendation.

**Arts Decanal Comments:** Not applicable.

**FGPS Decanal Comments:** As acknowledged by the Reviewers, admission requirements for the Master in Religion, Culture and Global Justice exceed those typical of Master's programs at Laurier. In particular, applicants must have a B+ average in their major to gain acceptance into this program. This helps to ensure admission of students that have the capability to be successful at the Master's level. I support the Unit in deciding to maintain this higher admission standard, as recommended by the Reviewers.

**Program Review Sub-Committee Comments:** No further reporting on this recommendation is required.

<b>Full Recommendation from External Reviewers' Report:</b> Ensure that the Department is endowed with a competent and functional Senior Administrative Assistant.				
Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)	Responsibility for Implementation	Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)	Anticipated Completion Date	Additional Notes

<p>Recommendation #3: Ensure that the Department is endowed with a competent and functional Senior Administrative Assistant.</p>	<p>Department and Dean's Office</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>Process already in place.</p>	
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**Unit Update:** The department has an administrative assistant on a part-time basis. No additional updates indicate a full-time position conversion. We will continue to advocate for the necessary administrative support for the department, but direct implementation of this recommendation is outside of our control.

**Arts Decanal Comments:** The Dean of Arts continues to work with all departments to ensure adequate administrative support suitable to the size of each program. At the same time, we advocate for additional resources to increase administrative staff.

**Program Review Sub-Committee Comments:** Both the department and the Vice Dean of the Faculty of Arts indicate that they will advocate, as necessary, for the appropriate administrative support for the department's needs. No further reporting on this recommendation is required.

<p><b>Full Recommendation from External Reviewers' Report:</b> Ensure that the Department of Religion and Culture be endowed with a number of full-time faculty that is representative of the duty incumbent on the Department: involvement of faculty in undergraduate and graduate teaching, administrative services within and outside the Department and supervision of MA and PhD students.</p>
<p><i>This recommendation was not prioritized in the Final Assessment Report.</i></p>

<p><b>Full Recommendation from External Reviewers' Report:</b> Lobby the government of Ontario to allow graduate programs like that in Religion, Culture and Global Justice more just in opening space for international studies. The program and the university would benefit a great deal.</p>
<p><i>This recommendation was not prioritized in the Final Assessment Report.</i></p>
<p>Note from the Dean of Arts: Can only be pursued at the university level.</p>

<p><b>Full Recommendation from External Reviewers' Report:</b> Better support and fund Religion and Culture faculty interested in working with the University Recruitment Office to better introduce high school students to the benefits of studying religion and culture.</p>			
<p><b>Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)</b></p>	<p><b>Responsibility for Implementation</b></p>	<p><b>Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)</b></p>	<p><b>Anticipated Completion Date</b></p>

<p>Recommendation #6: Better support and fund Religion and Culture faculty interested in working with the University Recruitment Office to better introduce high school students to the benefits of studying religion and culture.</p>	<p>Department and Faculty of Arts Recruitment and Retention Committee</p>	<p>Additional funding should not be required.</p>	<p>September 2024</p>
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**Unit Update:** This recommendation came at a time when the pandemic had a significant impact on our operations. Now that things have returned to normal, it is necessary to investigate this point further. We would like to employ all available channels to reach high school students.

**Arts Decanal Comments:** We encourage the department to continue its active involvement in all recruitment and outreach activities recognizing the benefits of personal engagement with prospective students. We encourage the department to coordinate with our office in this regard.

**Program Review Sub-Committee Comments:** The department is encouraged to continue to work with the Dean of Arts Office and Recruitment on Admissions on this ongoing recommendation, but no further updates will be required.

<p><b>Full Recommendation from External Reviewers' Report:</b> Develop a unit-wide PowerPoint slide (and/or a short video) that could be shared with large classes that would detail how/where/when students should apply as an RC major.</p>			
<p>Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)</p>	<p>Responsibility for Implementation</p>	<p>Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)</p>	<p>Anticipated Completion Date</p>
<p>Recommendation #7: Develop a unit-wide PowerPoint slide (and/or a short video) that could be shared with large classes that would detail how/where/when students should apply as an RC major.</p>	<p>Department</p>	<p>Dean of Arts office</p>	<p>September 2021</p>

**Unit Update:** Recruitment produced a video in 2021 (over two years ago, with 170+ views) that includes an interview between a student majoring in R&C and R&C faculty member with information about course options and program requirements. A “Road Map” to complete the Major requirements for the Honours BA in Religion and Culture was developed for Laurier’s Open House in November 2022 with a list of intramural and online courses offered by the department. Further review by Associate Dean of Arts Dr. Scott Gallimore resulted in helpful suggestions. The handout has subsequently been shared and discussed with R&C faculty and students, and the next step is to ask [media relations?] to assist with formatting the handout for a double-sided postcard for print distribution and a PowerPoint slide for display purposes before the open period for declaration and changes to programs in March 2023. We consider this initiative to satisfy the intent of this recommendation.

**Arts Decanal Comments:** The department is actively working towards this goal with support from our office.

**Program Review Sub-Committee Comments:** The responses provided by the department and the Vice Dean indicate that the intention of this recommendation has been completed. No further reporting is required,

<b>Full Recommendation from External Reviewers' Report:</b> Send personalized letters to students who do well (over 90%) in introductory courses, encouraging them to major. This last suggestion would be particularly apt for well-performing students in the Introduction to Muslim Studies course to encourage them to consider the benefits of declaring a Muslim Studies Option.			
Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)	Responsibility for Implementation	Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)	Anticipated Completion Date
Recommendation #8: Send personalized letters to students who do well (over 90%) in introductory courses, encouraging them to major. This last suggestion would be particularly apt for well-performing students in the Introduction to Muslim Studies course to encourage them to consider the benefits of declaring a Muslim Studies Option.	Department	N/A	January 2021

**Unit Update:** We developed a standard letter for instructors to send to high-performing students in RE and MZ courses with averages of 85% and above.

**Arts Decanal Comments:** We encourage active engagement with students who are in R&C courses as this is key to encouraging students to register for the Major.

**Program Review Sub-Committee Comments:** The actions described by the department attest to the completion of this recommendation. No further updates are required.

<b>Full Recommendation from External Reviewers' Report:</b> Be more lenient on minimum enrolment numbers in order to accommodate the excellent dual online-intramural system the department has worked so hard to build and maintain.				
Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)	Responsibility for Implementation	Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)	Anticipated Completion Date	Additional Notes
Recommendation #9: Be more lenient on minimum enrolment numbers in order to accommodate the excellent dual	Dean of Arts Office	N/A	Process already in place.	See Dean's response.

online-intramural system the department has worked so hard to build and maintain.				
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**Unit Update:** The department underwent significant budget cuts. As a result, course caps were substantially increased. Multi-section courses and those with low enrollment were the prime aim.

**Arts Decanal Comments:** At a time of significant financial constraints, the Dean must adhere to minimum enrolment numbers while doing its best to support programs with a significant online presence such as R&C.

**Program Review Sub-Committee Comments:** The implementation of this recommendation is not fully within the control of the department, who must make enrolment decisions consistent with the goals and priorities in the Faculty of Arts. While the intention of this recommendation by the review committee is admirable, it may not be a realistic one in a time of institutional fiscal restraint. No further updates on this recommendation will be required.

<b>Full Recommendation from External Reviewers' Report:</b> Introduce financial support to allow R&C instructors to revamp the highly popular feeder courses, "Love and its Myths" and "Evil and its Symbols." Maintaining the relevance of content and teaching pedagogies of these courses is imperative for their continued success.			
<b>Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)</b>	<b>Responsibility for Implementation</b>	<b>Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)</b>	<b>Anticipated Completion Date</b>
Recommendation #10: Introduce financial support to allow R&C instructors to revamp the highly popular feeder courses, "Love and its Myths" and "Evil and its Symbols." Maintaining the relevance of the content and teaching pedagogies of these courses is imperative for their continued success.	Department Dean of Arts Office	Funding provided by VP: Academic Expedited Online Course Development Fund	September 2020 January 2021

**Unit Update:** Revisions to online versions of both of these popular courses were completed during the pandemic with funding provided by VP: Academic. Other online courses have been revised and another new online course (RE204) is being developed (10 of 12 modules completed). OC offerings by R&C continue to contribute to a robust online curriculum in Arts and across the university, thus increasing access and flexibility to fulfill undergraduate programs, particularly during the pandemic. Further steps can be taken to publicize the availability of completing the Honours BA in Religion and Culture online, although cuts to online course stipends impede rather than facilitate realizing this goal. For the purposes of the cyclical review, we consider this recommendation to be completed.

**Arts Decanal Comments:** We support updating online course offerings and are working with all departments to be able to do so. We encourage the department to maintain key sections of popular online courses.

**Program Review Sub-Committee Comments:** This recommendation has been completed and no further updates are required.

<b>Full Recommendation from External Reviewers' Report:</b> Fund an annual lecture series over three years to support the visibility of the department's Muslim Studies Option.				
<b>Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)</b>	<b>Responsibility for Implementation</b>	<b>Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)</b>	<b>Anticipated Completion Date</b>	<b>Additional Notes</b>
Recommendation #11: Fund an annual lecture series over three years to support the visibility of the department's Muslim Studies Option.	Department	Various internal units within the university.	September 2021	See Dean's response.

**Unit Update:** Since this recommendation was not prioritized, no action was not taken by the department.

**Arts Decanal Comments:** Not applicable.

**Program Review Sub-Committee Comments:** No further updates on this recommendation are necessary.

<b>Full Recommendation from External Reviewers' Report:</b> Recommendation #12: Support the development and delivery of a summer institute, for which there was considerable interest and support by regular and contract faculty. Such an institute could have significant undergraduate uptake and, again, would be a way to spotlight the tremendous undergraduate programming in their department more widely.
<i>This recommendation was not prioritized in the Final Assessment Report.</i>

<b>Full Recommendation from External Reviewers' Report:</b> Support initiatives from the department for the creation of a Certificate in Religious Literacy. We expect that this certificate would be very marketable.			
<b>Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)</b>	<b>Responsibility for Implementation</b>	<b>Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)</b>	<b>Anticipated Completion Date</b>
Recommendation #13: Support initiatives from the department for the creation of a Certificate in Religious Literacy. We expect that this certificate would be very marketable.	Department  Teaching and Learning	N/A	September 2021



**Unit Update:** As a result of budget reductions, the department is unable to request additional resources for the creation of such a certificate.

**Arts Decanal Comments:** I agree with the department’s comments that implementing this recommendation is not a priority at this time.

**Program Review Sub-Committee Comments:** Based on the responses provided, no further updates on this recommendation are required.

<b>Full Recommendation from External Reviewers’ Report:</b> Consider introducing a dedicated MRP-focused course in the Winter semester where students would receive more structured support for writing (abstracts, papers) and grants’ crafting and work toward writing their MRP proposal.				
Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)	Responsibility for Implementation	Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)	Anticipated Completion Date	Additional Notes
Recommendation #14: Consider introducing a dedicated MRP-focused course in the Winter semester where students would receive more structured support for writing (abstracts, papers) and grants’ crafting and work toward writing their MRP proposal.	Department	A course proposal would need to be developed and vetted through the standard curriculum review process including the Graduate Faculty Council and the Senate Academic Planning Committee.		Timing would depend on when the department submits a course proposal and what (if any) modifications would be required by the various curriculum committees.

**Unit Update:** The course-based MRP has been changed to a model of individual faculty supervision with evaluation by a second reader, thus satisfying this recommendation. This modification is in place in the 2022-2023 Graduate academic calendar: <https://academic-calendar.wlu.ca/program.php?cal=3&d=2665&p=5929&s=1054&y=86>

**Arts Decanal Comments:** The Dean of Arts Office supports the changes to the MRP structure in Religion and Culture.

**FGPS Decanal Comments:** If I understand correctly, RE698 (Major Research Project) was previously led by a single instructor who guided and evaluated the Major Research Projects, whereas the course now leans on a model of individual faculty supervision and a second reader. I suspect that this approach is advantageous for



several reasons including 1) allows students to pursue projects aligned with individual faculty expertise, 2) advances research programs of individual faculty members, and 3) distributes workload among faculty members.

**Program Review Sub-Committee Comments:** The actions described by the department satisfy the intent of this recommendation, and no further updates are required.

<b>Full Recommendation from External Reviewers' Report:</b> Consider developing a dedicated MA-level global justice course. We saw this recommendation in both the in-person interview and in the self-study.				
<b>Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)</b>	<b>Responsibility for Implementation</b>	<b>Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)</b>	<b>Anticipated Completion Date</b>	<b>Additional Notes</b>
Recommendation #15: Consider developing a dedicated MA-level global justice course. We saw this recommendation in both the in-person interview and in the self-study.		A course proposal would need to be developed and vetted through the standard curriculum review process including the Graduate Faculty Council and the Senate Academic Planning Committee.		Timing would depend on when the department submits a course proposal and what (if any) modifications would be required by the various curriculum committees.

**Unit Update:** Curriculum modifications now require RE694: Global Justice in an Unjust World to be offered in Winter term after taking RE693 in Fall term. This course provides a critical introduction to the field of global justice and how it intersects with the study of religious beliefs and cultural identities by drawing on various theoretical and epistemological perspectives that seek to overcome the enduring problem of inequality. It is currently offered for the first time in Winter 2023.

**Arts Decanal Comments:** Religion and Culture has responded appropriately to this recommendation.

**FGPS Decanal Comments:** The recommendation has been addressed.

**Program Review Sub-Committee Comments:** This recommendation is considered completed and no further updates are required.

## **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

**Unit:** We believe the suggestions to be pertinent and in alignment with our envisioned future for the department, encompassing education, research, and administrative assistance. This document is inspiring when it comes to strategizing and innovating.

**Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies:** Two (2, 14) of the three recommendations related to the Master of Arts in Religion, Culture and Global Justice program have been satisfactorily addressed. Unit response to Recommendation 1, and the decanal comments from the Faculty of Arts, suggest that addressing this recommendation remains a work in progress. I encourage the Unit to continue to make efforts to enhance the profiles and unique strengths of the Unit's undergraduate and graduate programs.

**Program Review Sub-Committee:** The committee appreciates the updates provided by the department and the deans, which identify the actions that have been taken since the cyclical program review to implement the recommendations made by the external review committee. Based on the updates provided by the department, and the deans' responses, all of the recommendations prioritized in the Implementation Plan have been completed, or have been deemed not to be priorities at this time. No further Implementation Reports will be required in advance of the department's next scheduled cyclical program review in 2026-2027.

**Subsequent Report Required: No**