

**REPORT OF ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW
OF THE DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES
MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY
May 2004**

1. Preamble

This report is based on a careful review of the department's self-study, received by members of the panel about two weeks before the site visit at the end of March, and on the meetings, discussions and deliberations of the review panel during the site visit. This visit began with a meeting of the members of the panel with Dr Michael Collins, Acting Vice-President (Academic), Dr David Graham, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Dr Chet Jablonski, Dean of Graduate Studies. It was also attended by Ms Joan Bessey of the Office of the Centre for Institutional Analysis and Planning, who coordinated the entire site visit in addition to the preparatory work for the Academic Program Review. The members of the panel wish to record their debt of gratitude to Ms Joan Bessey for her gracious and capable support and guidance through the entire site visit process. This contributed greatly to the very satisfactory way in which the visit unfolded.

In the course of the next two days, the members of the panel met with the Head and the faculty members of the department collectively, with the Departmental Secretary as well as with representatives of both the undergraduate and the graduate student body. We had the opportunity to see the physical plant and resources of the department. We also had individual meetings with the Head of Department and with most of the faculty members individually and received in addition a written submission from Dr Jennifer Porter who was unfortunately unable to be present during the visit. Our final meeting was with Dr Jim Black, Associate Dean of Arts.

In the mid 1990s the department underwent what might be described as a tectonic shift in the constituency from which it has traditionally drawn a considerable portion of its course enrollments and, perhaps even more importantly, of its majors and minors. Changes in the province's educational system from denominational to non-denominational schools resulted in a very sudden and widespread drop in the need for new teachers equipped to teach classes in religious education. Where this demand had previously considerably inflated the numbers of students majoring in Religious Studies, its sudden decrease appears to have brought about a comparable and sudden deflation in the number of its majors and minors. Nevertheless, the resulting numbers show the department as easily holding its own in relation to majors and enrollments in comparably sized departments of the Faculty of Arts in a period in which enrollments in the Faculty as a whole have undergone a certain degree of fluctuation.

The department and its faculty members have shown great resilience in weathering what has been, for the reasons noted, a difficult period of adjustment and the fact that enrollments appear to be recovering well suggests that it is more than holding its own in the Faculty. Reports from representative students who met

the panel suggest that undergraduates are coming to Religious Studies a little later in their university careers than was true formerly. The panel noted that this is in line with departments of Religious Studies elsewhere. In spite of this, or perhaps partly as a result of academic maturity, they are finding it a fascinating and satisfying academic experience. In particular, they have noted the approachability and helpfulness of all the academic staff members and of the administrative offices, and the interesting nature of the course material offered. If the representatives of the student body that we met are indeed representative, the department deserves to be congratulated on an unusually successful contribution to the University's endeavour in recent years to become increasingly student-oriented.

The department currently has eight full-time faculty members and with a new appointment, effective in July 2004, will have nine. This makes it the largest Religious Studies Department in Atlantic Canada and indeed among the top third, in terms of faculty numbers, in Canada. Faculty members' qualifications and areas of expertise are wide-ranging. As with many academic departments at the present time, the average age of department members is high and two faculty members will retire over the next seven years. Considerations as to their replacement will clearly be of considerable importance in the next few years and these will have to be conjoined with further discussion about the aims and goals of the department as it moves into the future.

In part as a result of the shocks of the 1990s, discussed above, the department has undertaken a thorough review of its undergraduate program with a view to better fulfilling its mandate within the Faculty of Arts. The close conjunction of this review with the date for the septennial Academic Program Review has resulted in some problems for the review panel. It might have been better for one or other of these exercises to have been deferred. As it has worked out, the review panel was faced with an existing program which is about to be phased out and a new program which, although approved, will not come into force until September 2004. One of the principal questions addressed to the review panel has been what it makes of the changes and any implied change of direction implied in the new program. Specific comment on these matters will be found further on in this report where the specifics of the undergraduate and graduate programs are discussed.

The traditional strengths of the department have been in biblical studies and the history of the Christian religion, and it was noted that the great majority of graduate work to date has been in these areas. The move to complement this strength with a stronger stake in other religious traditions and issues is reflected in the recent undergraduate curriculum changes and the last few faculty appointments. Although to the members of the panel these developments do not seem disproportionate, they, and the manner in which they have been brought about, have led to not insignificant tensions within the department. It is the view of the panel that these tensions need urgently to be resolved in order that the department's work may move ahead smoothly. It is a mark of the high professional calibre and discretion of all department members that little of these tensions has been communicated to students in the department's programs.

Members of the review panel discussed at some length what directions the department might be encouraged to take in its future activities. There was general agreement on at least two points. The first relates to the revision of the department's program. The new courses added certainly are desirable in a comprehensive undergraduate program. It will be important as well not to jeopardize the existing strengths and specialties. It was the view of the members of the panel that the revision undertaken up to this point needs to be carried further, not least by the addition of structural elements that will encourage major and honours students to achieve depth as well as breadth in their education, so as to achieve a measure of confidence in the discipline. Weakness in this regard may account for the markedly low number of enrollments in the Honours program. These matters are further discussed in the more detailed consideration of the undergraduate and graduate programs in this report.

The second concern for the future activity of the department which was voiced in the meetings with the faculty was the possibility of some involvement in graduate teaching at the doctoral level. It was recognised that the establishment of a full-blown Ph D program is beyond the department's present abilities, although the library resources in some areas at least would certainly support doctoral research. Memorial University is fortunate in its possession of excellent collections in Religious Studies and cognate areas of the Humanities.

Two suggestions of a tentative nature were put forward. One was for a program available regionally among the Atlantic university departments of Religious Studies. It was recognised that the distances involved might constitute a problem in such a scheme. The other suggestion was that some kind of cooperative enterprise with other departments in the Faculty of Arts at Memorial University could make administration easier as well as exploiting recognisable interdisciplinary interests and expertise in the existing faculty. Engagement in higher level teaching and research would not only provide important stimulus and opportunity for present faculty members, but would make appointment to the department more attractive to high calibre scholars as positions open up in the coming years.

2. Undergraduate Program

2.1 Overview

The Department of Religious Studies at Memorial University has described itself as "student-oriented." That commitment to students was evident in the high level of satisfaction expressed by students with regard to the department and its faculty. Students were pleased with the availability of courses in all areas. They also expressed their interest in all areas of the curriculum with equal enthusiasm, and remarked universally that their professors were open and helpful and available to them. This high-level of student satisfaction is evident in the solid enrolments the department enjoys. The department should be commended for their commitment, and for the degree of professionalism that has allowed them to continue their good offices with regard to the students despite serious collegial conflict at the faculty/departmental level.

The presenting issue for that conflict is the recent revision of the undergraduate curriculum. As noted in the preamble, for many years the department served the university and the community in training students for the denominational school system. The undergraduate curriculum, and the faculty complement delivering it, reflected those demands. However, curricula are not set in stone. They change according to changes in demand, in faculty complement, student interests, and developments in the academic field. Periodic reflection upon, and revision of, a department's role and mandate is a normal part of departmental life. Such a process might have been initiated in the mid to late 1990s, for example, in response to changed demands upon the department due to changed student needs and changing faculty complement. Instead, the undergraduate curriculum remained unchanged in its basic structure — due in part, perhaps, to the high student satisfaction with the existing curriculum, as noted above. Over the last two years or so, however, a process was undertaken to revise the curriculum in what was perceived to be a foundational way. Our conversations with faculty were dominated by this topic, both with regard to curricular content, and with regard to the process by which curriculum revision was accomplished. Both will be readdressed in due course.

2.2 Curriculum Content

The former curriculum was divided into four streams: Biblical Studies; World Religions; Christian Thought and History; and Religion, Ethics and Modern Culture. Breadth requirements were accomplished primarily at the third year level. The new curriculum is comprised of three streams: A – “traditions that have shaped our own culture,” including Biblical Studies, Christianity, and some courses in Judaism; B – “religious traditions of Asia”; and C – an eclectic grouping of courses on “methodological issues, topics in comparative religions, and the relationship between religions and other aspects of culture.” Breadth requirements have been shifted to the second year level. The new curriculum has no pre-requisites for any of its courses, and there seems to be little teaching of 4000 level courses apart from 4998. While a “pyramid” structure is claimed for the new curriculum, it was not clear to the committee what this in fact meant.

The new curriculum does not seem to exhibit many structural features. There are also some confusing exclusions, such as courses in Islam and some courses in Judaism that have no home in any of the three streams. Pre-requisites are said to have been waived in the interest of flexibility, yet in their report (appendix A) students at the undergraduate level explicitly asked for greater sequencing of courses so that they might develop their studies in a more in-depth way. No evidence was presented to the review committee that would suggest that access was a problem, or that a link existed between access and student enrollments. “Flexibility” thus becomes a plausible, but ultimately an unsupportable rationale for the changes made to the curriculum. This leads to the question, what other reasons might there be?

It was suggested by a number of those interviewed that the department is moving from an emphasis on Christianity and Biblical studies to a “World Religions” model. Some clearly saw this as an advance. Certainly, it is important for students to be exposed to a range of manifestations of the phenomenon of religion in the course of their studies, and it is reasonably widely held within the field that exposure to “World Religions” is part of that training. However, a “World Religions” model generally includes some

comparative work amongst traditions, and in-depth study of at least one. The new curriculum has no such requirements. Students may take an entire degree without in-depth training in any particular tradition. They may specialize or not, as they choose, and no comparative study is required. The new curriculum may offer a different range of courses, but these are offered “cafeteria style.”

Faculty opinion was also divided on the perceived quality of course offerings, with one perspective holding traditional offerings in high esteem, where another looked to new courses as appropriate alternatives to these offerings. It is the committee’s view that these positions are not necessarily oppositional, and may be usefully harmonized as part of a longer term process of curriculum development. Overall, our observations about the content of the new curriculum are that the revision as it stands is still very much in process. Specific recommendations with regard to curricular content, and how to achieve a more satisfactory result, will be given below.

2.3 The Process of Curriculum Revision

Differences were expressed amongst faculty about the frequency of meetings and the care taken to allow sufficient time to assess proposed changes. One key factor was/is who was present on campus for the discussions. For example, Dr. Rollmann was seconded to a government project and then on leave, Dr. Hawkin was on leave, and Dr. Parker was off-campus while at his residence on Prince Edward Island. There clearly remains a degree of dissatisfaction with how the process worked.

Another factor in the perception of the process relates to the satisfaction held by different faculty with regard to the curriculum. For some, the existing curriculum was doing a fine job of meeting student needs and interests, as well as the needs of the community. For others, change was perceived as being long overdue. To some it seemed that requests for movement on this front had been overlooked. It is easy to see how some faculty would perceive the process as precipitous, and others as well-considered under the circumstances.

Discussions about a department’s direction are often difficult, but the extent of the differences attested to by virtually all members of the unit was notable. It is the view of the committee that tensions were exacerbated by the use of e-mail to discuss potentially divisive concerns. Given the absence of a number of faculty from campus during much of the period in which curriculum revisions were discussed, e-mail might have been seen as a logical way to move the process forward in a timely fashion. However, it is a medium that can quickly escalate conflicts that would never reach that point in face-to-face discussion with one’s valued colleagues.

Major changes to the program were made shortly before the external review process was undertaken. The close conjunction of these two events and their sequencing made the job of the review committee much more difficult, leaving us with the task of doing a post-mortem, rather than serving as fully as conversation partners and constructive resources as we might otherwise have been able to do.

2.4 *Assessment*

The new curriculum is broad and relatively unstructured, with little to no sequencing of courses. Under the new curriculum, there is no guarantee that students will achieve a competent level of depth in more than one area, as the depth requirement is met at the 2000 rather than the 3000 level. Similarly, a major may not achieve any degree of breadth, as all courses, with the exception of two introductory ones, can be taken in the same area. This lack of structure does not support the desire of some to move in the direction of World Religions, a key component of which has traditionally been comparative study. There are too many courses concentrated at the first and second year levels, while senior courses have been lost. Too little attention has been given to the kind of concentration of interest that would assure the value of the Major and Honours programs with a view to progress in the discipline. Further revision might be guided by consideration of what a graduate of the department should be expected to know if he or she should wish to pursue the discipline of Religious Studies at a higher level.

We received no information on grading norms, but we understand that the university does have procedures that at least minimally ensure comparability of grading practises throughout the university. With regard to resources, the faculty complement of the department of Religious Studies at Memorial is the largest in the Atlantic region, and among the top third of faculty complement in Canada. It is enviably placed to deliver a coherent, viable, diverse program in the academic study of religion.

Demand for religious studies courses is high. Course caps have recently been raised at the first, second and third year levels, and students are enrolling to fill them. While some concern was raised at changes to evaluation processes necessitated by this increase in student numbers, these challenges are not insurmountable. There is only one Honours student, which is unsurprising given the vagueness of the regulations for the Honours program. Students “collect” courses rather than build a program or progress through a series of courses. Courses in Bible are excessively subdivided, and might be consolidated, thus increasing their attractiveness. The program’s popularity is underscored by the students’ request for summer courses. Undergraduate students still come primarily from Newfoundland, and there is little to no regional competition. Graduate students are being attracted from out-of-province. Overall, the department is doing an excellent job of attracting students to the program and keeping them. The committee was strongly impressed by the fact that students come to the program late in their university careers, which is evidence that there is good recruitment within MUN.

The department is definitely keeping up its end in promoting the unit, both through its established reputation and through its recently developed website. University marketing people might look to promoting it more vigorously outside of the province. One strength of the program is its undergraduate library resources, which are excellent. The undergraduate students could use a reading room, with books and a file cabinet. It is not clear why the collection from Queen’s College that was recently turned over to the University Library was not seen as a source for such a reading room. No doubt many volumes handed over would have been “doubles” and beyond normal library requirements. Finally, the unit is fulfilling its service

responsibilities to other units in the university. In addition to providing Arts electives to other departments and programs, it has made a significant contribution to the Nursing program by providing ethics courses.

2.5 Undergraduate Program Recommendations

1. The “World Religions” model

If the department is serious about working within a World Religions model it will need to develop a sequenced series of courses and commit to teaching them regularly within an established rotation to ensure the credibility and uniformity of its undergraduate degree. Coordination and balance between teaching so-called “eastern” and “western” traditions would need to be accomplished.

2. Greater structure required in the degree program

Depending on what gets taught in specific courses, students seem to be able to major in religious studies with little or no grounding in religious studies itself, or in methods and theories common to the field (3810 is the exception that proves the rule). Some of what has been gained by aiming to attract students and increase enrollment has been lost in loosely forming students who may wish to enter graduate programs in religious studies. This may increasingly be the case now that the constituency has shifted away from teaching and education. Flexibility needs to be complemented by more attention to structure. As the number of majors rises, more attention will have to be given to the presence and nature of upper-year courses, as well as their content.

3. Curricular streams need to be made more coherent

A major tradition like Islam, for example, falls into no particular stream. Greater structure is needed to achieve both depth and breadth in the program.

4. Core required courses

The department needs to determine what their Honours, majors and minors trained in “religious studies” ought be expected to know (e.g. basic religious traditions; the history and current nature of religious studies; current debates in method and theory; local religious traditions and cultures). The department ought to consider core courses required for the major, that all students would need to take, such as Introduction to the Study of Religion, and/or World Religions to ensure students have a common foundation for their other studies.

5. Upper year offerings

In addition to core courses for the major, offerings at the 3rd and 4th year level need to be put in place so that students may deepen their knowledge of particular subject areas as they move through the program.

6. Consultation with other departments/programs

In the process of curriculum revision that will naturally occur over the next few years the department might well want to initiate discussions with other schools in Atlantic Canada, many of which have already undertaken the task of curricular transformation that the Religious Studies department at MUN is just now initiating for itself. Familiarization with what is going on elsewhere would also be helpful, both to the task of recruiting students from elsewhere, and for preparing students wishing to continue their academic studies at other institutions. Adequate professional formation of students is essential for running a credible graduate program. While specialized interests may serve well as electives, a coherent engagement with the core methods, theories, history, and figures of the field needs to be incorporated into the curriculum, ideally at both the graduate and the undergraduate levels.

6. Balance of activities

There is considerable disparity in the scholarly activity of members of the department, both with regard to research and to participation in conferences and professional organizations. A number of scholars are very active, but, in some instances, not in religious studies *per se*. Both these issues ought be remedied.

3. Graduate program

3.1 Review

The Religious Studies MA program has operated since 1990. Throughout this 14-year period it has been conceptualized as a program that takes the equivalent of two years of full-time work to complete, and comprises both course work and thesis.

The number of courses that students are expected to take was first set at six (1990), then decreased to five in 1994, and four in 1998 (12 credit hours of course work). In addition to these three courses, the calendar also lists 12 “Selected Topics in...” graduate courses and one “Special Topics in the Study of Religion” course.

The fourth (non-required) course currently offered “usually functions as preparatory work for the thesis” (Self Study 3.2.3). In effect, then, students now take the three required courses, and as their fourth course they do a guided study with their supervisor that helps to generate a thesis proposal (which must be

approved by the department's Graduate Studies Committee). This proposal in turn leads (full-time) students to their second year of graduate work, where they work exclusively on their thesis.

Thesis topics are chosen in the areas of faculty expertise. These have changed over the years to reflect new appointments and directions. Moreover, students must show proficiency in any language needed to complete the thesis work.

The number of MA students admitted to the department each year has fluctuated from 3 to 7 full time students and 0 to 2 part time, for a combined average of 5.5 (Table 1).

Table 1: Incoming MA Students, 1990-2003													
'90	'91	'92	'93	'94	'95	'96	'97	'98	'99	'00	'01	'02	'03
5 FT	4 FT	4 FT	6 FT	4 FT	5 FT	4 FT	5 FT	3 FT	7 FT	6 FT	4 FT	5 FT	4 FT
2 PT	1 PT	2 PT	0 PT	1 PT	0 PT	1 PT	1 PT	0 PT	1 PT	1 PT	1 PT	0 PT	0 PT
7	5	6	6	5	5	5	6	3	8	7	5	5	

As a result, a steady state of graduate students on campus has averaged 15 per year and recently runs somewhat higher (Table 2).

Table 2: MA Students in the Program, 1990-2003													
'90	'91	'92	'93	'94	'95	'96	'97	'98	'99	'00	'01	'02	'03
5 FT	7 FT	8 FT	14 FT	12 FT	13 FT	11 FT	13 FT	10 FT	16 FT	18 FT	17 FT	17 FT	15 FT
2 PT	1 PT	3 PT	2 PT	3 PT	1 PT	2 PT	2 PT	2 PT	2 PT	2 PT	2 PT	2 PT	2 PT
7	8	11	16	15	14	13	15	12	18	20	19	19	17

Of the 37 MA graduates from the program (from a total of 77¹), 20 have specialized in Biblical Studies, 10 in Christian thought, 5 in Culture and Ethics, and 2 in (other) World Religions. Accordingly, the thesis supervisory responsibilities have been divided as follows: David Hawkin (13.5), Hans Rollmann (6), Kim Parker (5.5), David Bell (4), Michael Shute (4), Lee Rainey (2), Mike DeRoche (1), and Jennifer Porter (1).

Section 3.2.2 of the Self Study notes that 18 students are in the process of completing their degree, while over the years 24 dropped out of the program before completing it. Eight graduates have gone on to

¹Number taken from Figure 1, Appendix F. Section 3.2.2. of the Self Study mentions 79 students accepted into the program from 1990 through 2003.

doctoral programs; three of those have completed their degrees (no information was given on whether those doctoral graduates have found employment). Section 3.2.8 also notes some of the other accomplishments of the MA students, including thesis work that has spun into publications and national essay prize awards.

The report by Mandy Furney, the graduate student representative (Appendix K), noted the department's faculty as "highly approachable, resourceful, friendly, and knowledgeable." She also spoke favourably about other issues in the program, including the core funding. A personal note from the Head of the department added that MA students receive about \$7500 per year for the two years of the program, with roughly \$4500 of that coming as Fellowship money, which is dependent on the student maintaining an overall B+ average.

3.2 *Assessment*

The research and scholarly productivity of the unit's faculty is generally appropriate to its graduate responsibilities, and certainly amongst those who have supervised the lion's share of the MA theses. The admission requirements laid out in the calendar (p. 438) are appropriate as well. Regarding the rigour and comprehensiveness of the curriculum, the mix of courses and thesis (including thesis proposal + any required languages) is strong. The three required courses could also provide rigour and comprehensive coverage if they were carefully structured. We did not receive a clear indication, however, that this was currently the case, so the Committee's suspicion is that the MA curriculum as now experienced by students is not as comprehensive or rigorous as it could be. In MA programs elsewhere, for example, it is not uncommon to have a core graduate course required of all students, such as one focussed on methods and theories that have shaped the field. Such a course could help develop a common identifiable profile for graduates, of especial value for those seeking to pursue their studies further.

We did not receive a comprehensive breakdown of each graduate student's financial support. We did hear, however, that the average is \$7500/year for two years, and that funding for students to attend conferences is rare. This funding situation, therefore, appears to be barely adequate, at best.

Regarding library resources, computing and library facilities, and other resources necessary to support the graduate program, Appendix H of the Self Study (Report on Library Holdings), prepared by Martin Howley, the Humanities Librarian, notes that "the collection's strength and depth . . . are sufficient, within the mandated scope of the Religious Studies graduate programs, to meet those [needs] of the graduate students at Memorial with some resort to interlibrary loan."

Graduate students also had use of a room allocated by the department. This room contains some computer equipment and books, with tables and space to help generate discussion and a sense of community.

3.3 *Graduate Program Recommendations*

The Committee encourages the department to turn its attention to the graduate program over the next three years, perhaps forming a committee to reflect on the following issues:

1. Curriculum Review and Development

- a. Curriculum revision needs to be undertaken at the graduate level, in tandem with ongoing undergraduate curricular discussions, perhaps also with a view to an extension into doctoral studies. There are many questions to consider — e.g., How many and what sort of courses are necessary to ensure that students emerge with a sense of the field, some depth and breadth, and a measure of methodological sophistication? Should the department as a whole play a part in sketching the nature of the three required courses so as to ensure a measure of consistency and rigour needed to reflect the field and prepare students for doctoral work?
- b. Several Canadian MA programs in Religious Studies require a thesis (e.g., University of British Columbia, University of Regina), some do not (e.g., University of Toronto, Queen's University), while others make it optional (e.g., Wilfrid Laurier University). With the department stretched to deal with several issues (e.g., increasing enrolment, the balance of younger and more seasoned faculty) members might want to reconsider the role of the thesis in the overall degree structure.

2. Increased Funding for Students

The current funding level for graduate students is not competitive with the majority of MA programs across the country. If this department is to attract students, especially those from the mainland, it must find ways to provide better funding for its students. For instance, the average yearly funding given to MA students in religion at McMaster University, Wilfrid Laurier University and Queen's University (combined TA and scholarship money) is between \$10,000 and \$12,000.² Increased funding will require a commitment from the university at large. What would also help is a change in culture among the faculty, leading to more applications for large external grants. To be sure, humanists across Canada typically do not often apply for external grants, but universities can mentor faculty in this regard and a department of this size can make grant applications a priority, partly to address the financial needs of its graduate students.³

²The Department of Religion and Culture at Wilfrid Laurier University, for instance, which has the same number of full-time faculty, takes in 12 to 14 MA students each year, and each student receives at least \$10,000 per year in funding.

³Queen's University is a good example of a department of Religious Studies where faculty members entice graduate students with the promise of serving as research assistants on multi-year, large externally-funded projects.

3. Raising Faculty Research Profiles

Senior faculty are to be commended for their research output. Junior faculty should be encouraged in their efforts to develop strong research portfolios so as to step up to the plate when retirements start occurring, and to draw graduate students from across the continent. Students are getting increasingly sophisticated at choosing schools based on several criteria of excellence, and a department's research profiles play a natural part in that decision-making process. With this in mind, new appointments should put a priority on candidates who either display clear promise of strong research, or who have a proven publishing record. Faculty should also be encouraged to participate actively in national societies and meetings so as to keep the departmental profile alive in the minds of students and faculty across the country.

4. Claiming and Keeping Space

Students and faculty both work best when they have adequate working and meeting spaces. Graduate student space must be kept at all costs, with every effort made to keep the seminar room open for classes, and keep computer facilities up-to-date — in fact, to increase their number whenever possible. Moreover, carrel space should be added when possible.

5. Monitoring Students

The Committee noted the absence of comprehensive data concerning the graduate cohort and encourages the department to set up a process whereby data could be gathered on an ongoing basis. For instance, who have the students been, from where have they come, to where have they gone (doctoral programs, other professional university degrees, and a variety of occupations in general)? How much funding has each received? How long has it taken each one to complete the program? What are some of the reasons for the relatively high drop out rate? Which students have presented at academic conferences and where have these been? Data gathering also applies to curriculum: what courses have students taken (where are the collected syllabi)? Is there any monitoring of what they've gained from the program?

The Dean of Arts might consider allocating a one-course release to a Graduate Officer for a three year period in order to establish a system of data gathering, in addition to working on other factors noted in this report.

6. Planning New Appointments

An effective graduate program requires the presence of a sufficient number of faculty, including a mix of senior and mid-career scholars. The Committee noted the strong level of support accorded to the department by the Faculty, who approved the appointment of a new member this

year (Patricia Dold, who will begin in July 2004), with discussions underway to appoint one, possibly two, more faculty over the next few years.

The next seven years will see the retirement of the department's two most senior faculty members: David Bell (June 2009) and David Hawkin (October 2010). The Faculty should plan to replace them — ideally to create bridge appointments two or three years earlier to help ease the transition, and to give the junior faculty time to settle into their responsibilities before taking on graduate supervisory duties.

7. Considering a PhD

At the present time, Memorial offers the only MA in Religious Studies in Atlantic Canada,⁴ although the establishment of an MA in religious studies, theology, and culture is currently under active development at St. Mary's University in Halifax. There are no doctoral programs in this field east of Montréal.⁵ MUN also contains the largest Religious Studies department in the Maritimes. In the Committee's view, it would be fitting for the department to consider introducing a doctoral program over the next three years. This could be done in at least two ways:

- a. A joint program could be established with other Maritime universities. Together, the faculty and library resources across the Maritimes equals or exceeds that of every other doctoral program in this country except the one at the University of Toronto. An Atlantic doctoral program in Religious Studies would require considerable coordination and planning (3.2.5 of the Self Study touches on an earlier attempt at Maritime collaboration on the MA level), but it could become one of the more attractive programs in North America.

The two other Canadian joint doctoral programs in religion (Concordia–Laval–Université du Québec à Montréal, and Wilfrid Laurier–University of Waterloo) could provide some initial ideas and models.

- b. Religious Studies could contribute to a MUN Faculty of Arts interdisciplinary doctoral program. This option could more quickly and easily be realized than a pan-Maritime program, and it would also lead to the increased solidification of Religious Studies in the Faculty. The disadvantages? The doctoral

⁴Religious Studies departments and programs also exist at Mount Allison, St. Thomas, St. Francis Xavier, Acadia, St. Mary's, Dalhousie, Mount St. Vincent, and UPEI.

⁵There currently are seven English-language doctoral programs in Religious Studies across the country: University of Calgary, University of Manitoba, McMaster University, University of Toronto, University of Ottawa, Concordia University (joint with UQAM and Laval), and McGill University. Two additional ones will start in September 2004: University of British Columbia and the Wilfrid Laurier–University of Waterloo joint program.

degree would lose its field specificity, and the opportunity to develop a pan-Maritime program would be lost.

Should the department wish to move in the direction of establishing a PhD, its hiring policy would have to fit this new direction. This would mean, *inter alia*, the following:

- (i) Gaining Faculty of Arts support to replace retiring faculty members — indeed, to create bridge appointments in these cases, as noted above.
- (ii) Placing attention on regional elements that help make Newfoundland, or Atlantic Canada, different than, say, Montreal, or Hamilton. A doctoral program here in part needs to acquaint students with what is local, allowing for field work and textual studies that are grounded in the regional culture.
- (iii) Nourishing areas of specialization. No program can do everything well, and doctoral students are best served by the presence of several faculty members in their area. Currently, Christianity and Bible reflect the strengths of the department (and the ethos of the region). These are also areas of demonstrated strength in terms of graduate studies (over 80% of the graduates have done theses in these areas), complemented by superb library resources, and outreach links, for instance, with Queen's College.

■ An obvious alternative, therefore, would be to hire in this area in order to build an ongoing, impressive coterie of scholars — e.g., adding experts in representative regional groups like the Salvation Army — and let other departments (at MUN or throughout the Maritimes) complement the faculty members who currently work in other areas of religion.

■ Another alternative would be to hire so as to develop a second strong area, either tradition- or methodologically-based. For instance, Jennifer Porter's training in social-scientific approaches to understanding religion could be matched by another scholar trained in field work, examining local (Christian, Jewish, Muslim, etc.) communities, thereby complementing what is an otherwise mainly textual and historical departmental focus. Or a scholar trained primarily in method and theory could be introduced, to help ground the graduate students in the field and in various approaches to understanding religion, hopefully generating conversations between all members of the department on methodological questions.

4. Faculty Research and Scholarship

4.1 *Strengths*

Section 4 of the Self Study Report outlines the Department's research strengths. These include the following:

1. The Department has several faculty members who conduct research in the study of Christianity: Bell, Rollmann, Hawkin, Parker, DeRoche, and Shute. Together they are able offer a first-rate program for students who are interested in various aspects of this tradition. In fact, this depth of coverage is matched by only two or three other anglophone religious studies departments across the country.
2. New Religious Movements is an area of growing interest to students and researchers alike, with precious few researchers. MUN is fortunate to have an expert in this area (Porter). Similarly, Canada has only a handful of scholars in Chinese religions; MUN again is fortunate to have someone in this area (Rainey). The same could be said about experts in local religious traditions. Rollmann's work on religions of Newfoundland makes a significant contribution to the mix.
3. Faculty members have received over \$130,000 in research money over the last five years (4.4), including one strategic grant and two standard grants from SSHRC.
4. Hawkin especially has been active in national academic organizations; Porter and Parker have also had some involvement on national Executives.
5. There have been significant links between faculty research and both industry and government (5.3), as well as some engagement with popular media (e.g., Rollmann is currently religion columnist for the St. John's Telegram).

4.2 Research and Scholarship Recommendations

The Committee finds the research strengths impressive, but also notes areas of concern:

1. As the senior people move towards retirement, others will need to develop strong research portfolios in order to assure quality instruction and graduate student training. Research strength is currently not distributed evenly; compared to other departments across the country the Department's research profile is also slightly under average.
2. More members of the Department could be engaged in national and international academic organizations, attending conferences on a regular basis, taking leadership roles. With one of two exceptions, members of the department tend to be conspicuous by their absence at such gatherings.
3. Although research funding is acceptable by national standards for faculty in the humanities and social sciences, more effort might be made to apply for large research grants — partly to spur quality research, but also to generate more funding to attract top-notch graduate students.

5. Faculty and Staff

5.1 Overview

The Department currently has eight full-time faculty members and one full-time staff member. In July 2004 a ninth permanent, full-time faculty member will join the department. The age profile is relatively healthy, with two members (Bell, Hawkin) set to retire over the next seven years and the rest spread out fairly evenly thereafter. The gender balance (4/10 women, including the new appointment) is also healthy, although there is not much ethnic variation. Effusive praise from all quarters was showered on Mary Walsh, the Department's long-serving Administrative Secretary.

Teaching loads — 5 courses per year, with thesis supervision and reading courses treated as extra teaching — are heavy but consistent with other universities across the country. Faculty members also seemed to be sharing the load fairly evenly.

5.2 Faculty and Staff Recommendations

Committee members were struck by the quality of the human resources, but also noted a few areas of concern:

1. Greater balance could be achieved in graduate thesis supervision. A few members, Hawkin especially, have carried a disproportionate number of students.
2. Administrative decisions seemed to be centred on the Head, leading others to disengage from service responsibilities and placing the burden of administration on the shoulders of one individual. Greater distribution of responsibilities could be had — including, e.g., the delegation of Graduate and Undergraduate advising to other members, more frequent rotation (every three years?) of the Head, and more clearly delineated committees directed by other members. On one level it is efficient to have one person (the Head) take responsibility for a wide range of responsibilities; on the other, this model of leadership works against the full engagement of human resources, including a consultative process of leadership. In order to increase involvement in the decision making process, the Department might also consider setting aside time for regular meetings, rather than call meetings as business arises.

6. Community Service

6.1 Overview

Section 5 of the Self Study Report outlines many ways in which the Department serves various constituencies. These include academic organizations, publishing houses, government and industry, and the media. Members' appended cvs also outline more fully their participation in various aspects of community

service. Section 9.2 of the Report also outlines future plans to develop increased collaboration with other departments at MUN.

6.2. *Recommendations*

1. Greater effort could be made to introduce students to professional community service — e.g., by accompanying students to academic conferences, having them participate in media and industry links.
2. All members should be encouraged to consider themselves public intellectuals, representing their department and the university in the community at large.

7. University Citizenship

7.1 *Overview*

The Committee noted in members' cvs the usual range of faculty participation in university committees and clubs. The Committee, though, was unable to assess in what ways the Department has effectively worked with other units, or what its profile is on campus. It noted, however, the sentence in 3.2.5: "There has not as yet been any collaboration with other departments, schools, or faculties within the University other than using faculty members to act as internal readers for theses."

7.2 *Recommendation*

1. The Department could develop a five-year plan to explore links with other units. One possibility would be to cooperate on a joint doctoral program.

8. University Support

8.1 *Overview*

The Department currently seems to have adequate resources, including both physical and human resources. Members, for instance, each have an office and up-to-date computer, the graduate students have their own (shared) room, and the department has a seminar room for meetings and small classes.

8.2 *Recommendations*

1. It is imperative that the Department keep the physical space it has in order to allow for expansion in the future (keeping members on the same floor) and for creative use of space on an ongoing basis. Having students and faculty on the same floor can only help to generate a sense of community.

2. Undergraduate students need a social and study space. This space will become important as the number of majors increases. Space will also feed social and academic forms of activity and help generate increased attachment to the department.
3. Computer support for graduate and undergraduate students in their spaces needs to be a priority. This includes plugs and internet connections for lap top computers, and regularly updated desk top computers.
4. New faculty need to be added whenever possible, in order to help keep this department the top in Atlantic Canada and to expand into other areas of study. Moreover, the upcoming retirements of the two top researchers in the department (Bell, 2009; Hawkin, 2010) could be made far less disruptive if bridging appointments could be made in three or four years.
5. Graduate student scholarship support needs to increase if this department is to attract the country's top MA students. The School of Graduate Studies needs to provide a more competitive level of funding. For instance, across Ontario M.A. students on average receive \$10,000-\$12,000 per year in combined (TA + scholarship) funding while MUN now offers about \$7500 per year.

9. Plans, Goals, and Resource Allocation

9.1 Overview

The department's strategic objectives, as outlined in 1.3 of the Self Study Report, are sound. They include curriculum revision, and the widening of horizons to accord with the University's new strategic plan: "Quality, Outreach Education, Community Resource, Mid-North/Atlantic, and Expanding Horizons."

9.2 Recommendation

9. With the full involvement of its members, this Department could actively plan to expand in ways that accord with the new strategic plan. This expansion would involve new appointments, as requested in 1.3, as well as developing a clear sense of how the Department hopes to widen its horizons. The Committee encourages the Department to continue to engage in the process of imagining ways in which it can develop and grow, while keeping its notable strengths.

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