

# Two-Year Progress Report

## Religious Studies (BA, Minor, PhD) and Jewish Studies (Minor)

### April 2022

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#### Background

In 2018, in accordance with the University of Waterloo’s Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), the Religious Studies Department was asked to review its programs:

- Religious Studies (BA) including,
  - Religious Studies (Major)
  - Religious Studies (Minor)
  - Jewish Studies (Minor)
- Religious Studies (PhD) – joint with Wilfrid Laurier University

The self-study (Volumes I, II, III) for this cyclical review of the Religious Studies and Jewish Studies programs was submitted in October 2018. In December 2018, a review team, consisting of one Waterloo faculty member and two external reviewers, visited both the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University (with respect to the joint doctoral program only). In January 2019, the reviewers submitted their report that the above programs were “in overall good standing and have excellent faculty.” In April 2019, the Department responded to the External Reviewers’ report including submitting an Implementation Plan that addressed the reviewers’ recommendations and added others outlined in its April response. This two-year report follows the structure of that Implementation Plan (attached).

In January 2020, the department received its Final Assessment Report, which was approved by Senate Undergraduate Council in June of that year. This current Two-Year Progress Report documents the departments attempt to address the recommendations of the reviewers and the goals its members set. At every step of the review process from early 2018 to June 2020, administrators at the five agencies that support the department (Waterloo’s Faculty of Arts, Conrad Grebel University College, St. Jerome’s University, St. Paul’s University College, and Renison University College) were consulted—as were our partners at Wilfrid Laurier University (with respect to the joint doctoral program only).

### Enrollment over the past two years

	Honours	4YR General	3YR General	Minor – Religious Studies	Minor – Jewish Studies	PhD
<b>2021-2022</b>	2	1	2	12	1	6
<b>2020-2021</b>	4	1	4	11	1	10

Based on Active Students Extract retrieved from Quest, January 31, 2022.

### Progress on Implementation Plan

Naturally, the implementation of responses to the various recommendations of the external reviewers has been impacted by the Covid-19 emergency and closure of campus. While there have been no significant alterations to the *substance* of the original implementation plan, *timelines* obviously have been affected. Despite these challenges, the department has moved forward where it could. In fact, most of the substantive issues have been addressed. However, long-term issues (items 8-10 below) that require extended negotiations with the heads of the five agencies remain to be addressed. It should be noted that these items were not raised by the external reviewers but by the department itself in its self-study and response to the reviewers. The concerns of the reviewers have all been addressed in whole or in part.

### Recommendations

1. Increase the visibility of the Department, its programs, and its courses on the UW campus in order to address decline in number of Majors and course enrolments.

**Status:** In progress

**Details:** In 2019-2020, the Department undertook a series of very successful student-oriented meet-and-greet events to promote its program. Promoted on course Learn sites and in classrooms, these well-attended events were held on main campus and at the Affiliated and Federated Institutions at Waterloo (AFIW). Regrettably, the Covid-19 emergency put an end to these events, but we intend to resume them as soon as possible. Moreover, the departmental web site has been updated, and we have renewed the presence of the department on social media sites (Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook). The Undergraduate Affairs Committee is currently examining ways to promote the visibility of the program and department. Necessarily work on this recommendation will never be “completed.”

2. Review the program requirements and curriculum in order to make the program more coherent and feasible for students and to attract more majors and course enrolments.

**Status:** Completed

**Details:** The department undertook an extensive overhaul of its plan and course offerings. The Undergraduate Affairs Groups (UGAG) approved of the simplification of the department's plan in fall 2019. Between January and June 2020, the department either inactivated (deleted) or modified the titles and course descriptions of 31 courses spread over the five agencies that sponsor the department. A number of new courses were also developed and approved. In this process, the department sought to make the program more relevant to today's student cohort (the majority of whom have had little to no experience of religion). It eliminated courses that once were popular but no longer attract student interest.

The external review noted that structuring and offering the program was difficult in light of the fact that each agency made its own decisions about course creation, offerings, and deletions. Therefore, the department charged its Undergraduate Affairs Committee to develop a policy on course development, scheduling, and inactivation. The committee developed a four-page policy document that was approved at a departmental meeting in March 2020. The new policy softens this concept of "ownership" of courses by agencies, allows for more collaboration, and gives the department (rather than each agency) more control over the curriculum. The goal is to empower the department to attract majors and to fashion the program and courses in a way that makes it easier for students to meet requirements.

3. Renewal of the doctoral program to expand its purview to allow broader participation, partner with other units at Waterloo, and implement an Indigenization plan.

**Status:** Ongoing

**Details:** Working through the Joint Committee on the Laurier-Waterloo Doctoral Program in Religious Diversity in North America, the department effected important changes to the doctoral program that included:

- Expanding the range of formats of the General and Field Comprehensive Exams to allow supervisory committees to tailor them to student needs;
- Introducing a "manuscript option" for the doctoral dissertation (based largely on the Geography Department's [model](#));
- Introducing more detailed requirements and instructions for the doctoral dissertation proposal process;
- Introducing more detailed requirements and instructions for the public presentation milestone.

Discussions to partner with other units at Waterloo and to introduce Indigenization into the program were interrupted by the departure of the Program Director at Laurier (the position rotates between the two institutions on a three-year basis) and the Covid-19 crisis. The director's position has returned to Waterloo as of 1 July 2021, and Doug Cowan now serves as the Director of the Joint Program and RS Graduate Officer. He is committed to addressing the remaining recommendations.

4. Address doctoral student request for a Methods course to be offered in the Winter semester.

**Status:** Complete.

**Details:** In response to our request, Laurier, which offers the required RS/RE 710 course, has committed to refashioning this course as a course in research methods.

5. Foster communication, community, and collegiality among the doctoral students, between the two institutions, and between the faculty and doctoral students.

**Status:** Complete and ongoing.

**Details:** Up until March 2020, the department organized a series of in-person social events for doctoral students, which were well attended and very successful. These have since been suspended in light of the Covid-19 emergency. However, during her term from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021, the Acting Director at Laurier, Dr. Carol Duncan, responded to the isolation the Covid-19 crisis by introducing regular bi-weekly online “check-in” sessions. Moreover, she organized a series of colloquia featuring scholars from within the program and from outside universities. Finally, she organized workshops for our doctoral students on such topics as “research methods,” “the process of writing,” and “writing a plan of study” for a grant application (e.g., SSHRC, OGS, etc.). Doug Cowan, the current director, has committed to maintaining these avenues of communication, community, and collegiality.

6. Increase the decision-making power of the Chair.

**Status:** Ongoing.

**Details:** Given that it is sponsored by five separate agencies (the Faculty of Arts and four AFIW), the Department of Religious Studies operates more as a centre than a regular Arts department. (It is the only unit at Waterloo in which the majority of professors are located at the AFIW, which do their own hiring and schedule their own courses.) The external reviewers felt that the Chair—working collaboratively and collegially with department members—needed more power to define the program and the curriculum. This need was particularly acute in light of falling numbers of majors and course enrolments. This issue was largely addressed by the adoption of a new policy on course creation, scheduling, and deletion (see point 2 above).

However, to address this issue fully would require the cooperation and approval of the heads of the five agencies. Consequently, the Chair arranged a meeting of the head and deans of the agencies in February 2020. The meeting was very productive, and the heads agreed to review this issue and others (see below). Regrettably, the University began its Covid-19 response in early March 2020, and the department chair, deans, and

heads of the agencies turned their attention to more immediate concerns. Consequently, there has been no further progress on this issue. Meanwhile, several agencies are experiencing changes in leadership (three new deans, two new heads), which will slow further progress on this issue for the next year. We have initiated a process to address this issue in the Winter 2022 semester.

7. Increase the hours of the Administrative Manager to full-time.

**Status:** Incomplete.

**Details:** The Chair approached the Heads of the five agencies to enquire about the possibility of increasing the Administrative Manager's position to full-time (35 hours) as per the external reviewers' recommendation. This issue was to be one element of the review agreed to at the meeting of heads and deans in February 2020. However, in light of the financial restraints introduced by the Covid-19 crisis (including the 15 percent hold-back of budgets introduced by Waterloo), there was no appetite to increase spending in this area. The Chair has initiated a process to address this issue in the Winter 2022 semester.

8. Address the issue of RS faculty course releases due to secondments, administrative duties, and teaching in other units.

**Status:** Ongoing.

**Details:** While the department officially has 13 members, because of secondments, course releases for administrative duties, and teaching in other units, it has the equivalent of six fully active faculty members, making scheduling courses and filling administrative roles in the department difficult. This issue was to be one element of the review agreed to at the meeting of heads and deans in February 2020. However, in the meantime, the terms of three AFIW administrators who are Religious Studies members have expired, which means they will be returning to their teaching duties. This will greatly alleviate this problem by July 2022.

9. Plan for future retirements, which could represent half of the current faculty complement within the next seven years.

**Status:** Incomplete.

**Details:** Given that each agency controls its own hiring, this medium-term concern was to be one element of the review agreed to at the meeting of heads and deans in February 2020. We have initiated a process to address this issue in the Winter 2022 semester.

10. Address equity issues in the Department.

**Status:** Incomplete.

**Details:** This is a long-term issue (connected to #9 above) that was to be one element of the review agreed to at the meeting of heads and deans in February 2020. The issue will be addressed again when the university resumes its normal operations in the Fall.

**Updated Implementation Plan** update table below to reflect timelines etc.

	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Proposed Follow-up</b>	<b>Responsibility for Leading and Resourcing (if applicable) Follow-up</b>	<b>Timeline for addressing Recommendation</b>
1.	Increase the visibility of the Department, its programs, and its courses on the UW campus in order to address decline in number of Majors and course enrolments.	Continue revision of the RS department website to consistently target the typical undergraduate student (19-25 years old, etc.).	Chair	December 31, 2022
	Visibility (con.)	Develop and institute a public communications procedure that regularly promotes the department, focusing especially on maximizing the effectiveness of online tools (social media, UW Learn, etc.) and adding a public presentation event of undergraduate research in RS.	Associate Chair, Undergraduate Affairs	August 31, 2022
2.	Review the program requirements and curriculum, and visibility	Largely completed. We will continue to introduce new courses as AFIW administrators return to teaching, we will introduce new courses that reinforce the curriculum attract more students. Emphasis will be put on Indigenization.	Associate Chair, Undergraduate Affairs	July 1, 2022

	Review the program requirements and curriculum (con.)	The Department will request a meeting of the Heads (or their delegates) of the five agencies to come to an agreement around Teaching Equity levels in Religious Studies, asking for clarification and commitments re: teaching levels in relation to administrative/teaching responsibilities within the agencies, etc.	Chair	January 31, 2022
3.	Renewal of the doctoral program to expand its purview to allow broader participation, partner with other units at Waterloo, and implement an Indigenization plan.	The department will begin exploratory discussions with potential Waterloo partners regarding the possibility of expanding the scope of the doctoral program and partnering with other units at Waterloo.	Associate Chair, Graduate Studies	January 31, 2022
	Doctoral program (con.)	The department will hold a joint retreat with its Laurier counterpart to review the doctoral program and to consider an expanded vision moving forward.	Associate Chair, Graduate Studies	July 1, 2022
4.	Address doctoral student request for a Methods course to be offered in the Winter semester	Completed	N/A	N/A
5.	Foster communication, community, and collegiality among the doctoral students, between the two institutions, and between the faculty and doctoral students.	Ongoing. The Department will further coordinate with its Laurier counterpart to address this issue.	Associate Chair, Graduate Studies	December 31, 2021

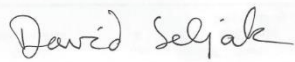


6.	Increase the decision-making power of the Chair.	The Department will request a meeting of the Heads (or their delegates) of the five agencies to discuss, clarify, and agree upon the role and powers of the Chair.	Chair	January 31, 2023
7.	Increase the hours of the Administrative Manager to full-time.	The Chair will approach the Heads of the five agencies to enquire about the possibility of increasing the Administrative Manager's position to full-time (35 hours).	Chair	January 31, 2022
8.	Address the issue of RS faculty course releases due to secondments, administrative duties, and teaching in other units.	The Department will meet with the Heads of the five agencies to confirm their commitment to Religious Studies, including both teaching essential courses and participating in service essential to the well-being of the department.	Chair	January 31, 2022
9.	Plan for future retirements, which could represent half of the current faculty complement within the next seven years.	The Department will undertake a study of the impact of impending retirements on the undergraduate and doctoral programs, asking each agency for a commitment to replace retiring professors.	Chair	January 31, 2022
10.	Address equity issues in the Department.	The Department will meet with the Heads of the five agencies to negotiate a renewed commitment to equity in hiring in Religious Studies.	Chair	January 31, 2022

The Department Chair/Director, in consultation with the Dean of the Faculty shall be responsible for monitoring the Implementation Plan.

Date of next program review: \_\_\_\_\_ **2024-2025.** \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Signatures of Approval:



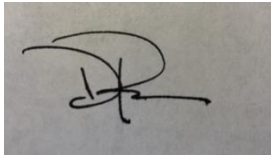
April 1, 2022

David Seljak, Chair

Date

AFIW Administrative Dean/Head (For AFIW programs only)

Date



5/vi/2022

Douglas Peers, Acting of Dean, Faculty of Arts

Date

**Note:** AFIW programs fall under the Faculty of ARTS; however, the Dean does not have fiscal control nor authority over staffing and administration of the program.

AVPGSPA signed on behalf of AVPA

March 31, 2022

Associate Vice-President, Academic  
(For undergraduate and augmented programs)

Date



March 31, 2022

Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs

Date

(For graduate and augmented programs)