

Update Report and Action Plan

Catholic Studies Minor

August 2025

Executive Summary

Consistent with the University of Waterloo’s Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), stand-alone minors, diplomas, and comparable credentials are subject to a seven-year desk review cycle. This review provides an opportunity for program leadership to evaluate program quality and to plan targeted enhancements.

A self-study was submitted to the Associate Vice-President, Academic, on August 28, 2025. Following the self-study, the Vice-President Academic and Dean, and the Faculty Dean reviewed and responded to the program’s action plan.

Program leaders identified five actions, focusing on the future of the Minor, comprehensive review, funding sources, the RS 349 course, and recognition among other Ontario school boards of the Catholic Studies Minor; and included a timeline for implementation in their plan. The next cyclical review for this program is scheduled for **2032-2033**.

This report is based on information extracted from the self-study and action plan.

Number of Students Who Graduated with the Credential

Table 2															
Number of Students who Graduated with a Minor in Academic Plan: Catholic Studies															
Program Level	Total Number of Graduates (#) and percentage on the Dean’s Honours List (DHL)														
	2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024		
	#	% DHL	#	% DHL	#	% DHL	#	% DHL	#	% DHL	#	% DHL	#	% DHL	
General	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	
Honours	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	100.0%	1	0.0%	1	100.0%	
Honours Co-op	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	
Total	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	100.0%	2	50.0%	1	0.0%	1	100.0%	

Notes:

1. Data includes headcounts only.
2. Degree Year is the year of the student's convocation (when the degree is awarded - which may be different than the date when the degree completion requirements were met.)
3. Data includes AFIW students, if applicable.

Program Characteristics

The Catholic Studies Minor offers students an opportunity to explore the Roman Catholic intellectual tradition as well as the historical and social impact the Church has had (for better and for worse) throughout history and in the world today. It is a unique, interdisciplinary program offered to all University of Waterloo students without regard to their own perspective on faith (if any at all).

Summary of Strengths, Weaknesses, Challenges, and Opportunities from the Self-Study

Strengths

- The Catholic Studies Minor provides students with an interdisciplinary program (theology, sociology, history, literary studies, etc.) that exposes them to many aspects of the Catholic tradition, both through traditional religious studies courses and electives from other disciplines. The required RS courses provide the students with the opportunity to study with tenured faculty in the Department of Religious Studies, and the program also makes it possible for them to study with faculty from other departments at SJU and at Waterloo. A particular mention should be made of RCS 349: The Mystical Imagination, co-taught by Drs Chad Wriglesworth and Norm Klassen; it explores the relationship between society, mystery, and the imagination. The course was initially offered as RS 249 and students nominated the instructors who went on to win two major teaching awards from WUSA. Just prior to the pandemic, it was revised so that it could be taught in Rome. It has not yet been offered in its approved travel-abroad form. This is the kind of course upon which we can revise and expand the Minor. Another strength is the promotion of a commitment to social engagement and especially to social justice concerns both at home and internationally. For example, the ethics course (RCS 150, 251, and 283) all address social justice issues directly—as does RCS 354 Shapers of the Roman Catholic Tradition. Given that the Roman Catholic community is spread globally, the Catholic Studies program contributes to the social impact and internationalization priorities of the University of Waterloo.

Weaknesses

- For a variety of reasons (but mostly the demands of other administrative service by members of the SJU Religious Studies Department), the Catholic Minor program has not found a champion. Consequently, Catholic Studies has not found a place to thrive within RS department. As noted above, Drs Wriglesworth and Klassen have demonstrated interest in the substance of the program; they have garnered teaching awards for a course that could well serve as the keystone course for a specialization. However, the Minor still needs to be “owned” by the RS Department as a whole and promoted by an individual in that department. A different, more interdisciplinary structure might be a path forward to increasing enrolment. Any such revision of the program will necessarily need to be integrated in the restructuring of the Faculty of Arts at Waterloo.

Challenges

- Our greatest challenge has been recruiting students to pursue a Minor in Catholic Studies. Partly this is because we face low enrolment in RS courses. Since 2011, undergraduate enrolment in RS courses is down about 40%—a trend we see across Canada and the United States. Three converging trends have contributed to this phenomenon.
 - The prioritization of higher education as training for a profession (not many see Religious Studies or Catholic Studies as contributing to their employment success)
 - The decline in interest in religion among young Canadians (according to recent survey and Census data, young Canadians increasingly identify as having “no religion”)
 - The weakening of denominational identity among those young people who remain religious (in the latest Census, the category of “Generic Christian” has grown, and studies have shown an increase in young people who identify as “spiritual but not religious”).
- We need to find ways to increase the visibility of Catholic Studies on campus, educate students on the value of having a solid grasp of Roman Catholicism in Canada and the world, and help them to appreciate the specific contributions of Roman Catholicism to both the private lives of individuals and to public life. That said, the administration of SJU is aware that the organizational and fiscal climate at the university is not currently one that makes supporting small class sizes easy—no matter how beneficial those experiences are for students. The challenge is to support a program that may have limited enrolment in the short term but has potential in the medium and long term.

Opportunities

- There are many viable Catholic Studies programs in Canada—both in Roman Catholic and secular institutions. Some of the secular universities are affiliated or federated with Catholic institutions, but others are not. For example:
 - King’s University College at Western University has a major, Minor, and specialization in Catholic Studies as well as a major, minor, and specialization in Catholic Studies for Teachers
 - The University of St. Michael’s College at the University of Toronto has a Master of Religious Education as well as graduate theological programs in Roman Catholicism
 - McGill University has a minor concentration in Catholic Studies housed in its School of Religious Studies
 - University of Manitoba has a minor
 - St. Thomas University has a major and minor
 - St. Francis Xavier University has a major
 - University of Prince Edward Island has a minor
 - The success of these programs demonstrates that there is an enormous opportunity to offer students a unique, signature program in Catholic Studies at St. Jerome’s. Given that the Catholic Studies program is closely connected to the mission and community connections of St. Jerome’s, there are also many opportunities for raising funds for student scholarships, teaching and resources support, as well experiential and service-learning opportunities. SJU has several philanthropically supported mission-aligned programs, including the Masters in Catholic Thought and Lectures in Catholic Experience. It routinely raises scholarship and bursary funding for undergraduate students who co-register at St. Jerome’s. There is also the potential to attract donor support and generate student engagement by creating a visiting scholar/artist program similar to those offered by Catholic universities in the United States and affiliates of other major Ontario research universities.
 - Finally, the reorganization plans of the Waterloo Faculty of Arts may present opportunities for the development of the Minor and growth enrolments. Arts restructuring could, for example, broaden the awareness of the Minor among students and attract a champion of the Minor from the new “schools”.
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Action Plan

It is clear that the St. Jerome's University administration—in collaboration with faculty and staff—need to expand and develop the Catholic Studies Minor. Steps include:

- Comprehensive review: undertaking a review to determine the viability of the program, including student interest, curricular support (e.g., available classes), and strategic priority in relation to the SJU [Academic Plan 2023-2026](#).
- Stakeholder outreach: undertaking an inventory of stakeholders who would support the Minor (e.g., local separate school boards, Faculty of Education, Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association, Canadian Catholic School Trustees' Association, and other Catholic universities, and others who might benefit from online course delivery of Catholic Studies courses).
- Advancement opportunities: exploring community engagement and fundraising to support the program.

Towards these to general strategies, we would implement the following action items:

General Commentary (VPAD)

This program is part of our institutional identity and mission. We are realistic about the idea that it may never be a large program but hope it can continue to develop into a more viable one through (a) a curriculum that largely draws on courses that serve other needs and appeal to more general audiences and (b) leveraging the possibility that we can work with relevant external partners to ensure the minor is an asset to future teachers in the Ontario Catholic School system interested in teaching religion.

General Commentary (Dean of Arts)

We respect our colleagues intentions and commitment. We are open to conversations about the development of the curriculum, while recognizing that many of our major and minor disciplines depend on the same audience, and that revenue is limited. The suggestion to work with the OCSB to support their work is an excellent one.

Action 1: Keep Minor on the books.

Keep the Minor in the calendar: such a program is best kept on the books for an institution that identifies as Catholic.

Dean's Response (VPAD, St Jerome)

We are committed to finding a way to keep this program on the books

Dean's Response (Arts)

We support our colleagues and their decisions and will continue to provide administrative support to the Minor.

Action 2: Conduct a comprehensive review of the program in order to revise the program in relation to student engagement, available resources, and relation to SJU's Academic Plan

Coordinate a conversation involving all the stakeholders, including SJU department, Waterloo department, Dean of Arts. As of March 2026, we have begun to review the courses in the Catholic Minor Program with a view to approaching the seven school boards in the Diocese of Hamilton to recognize the completion of the Catholic Minor Program as qualifying teachers to teach Religion courses in the Separate School system.

Dean's Response (VPAD, St Jerome)

The Academic Plan highlights the unfortunate reality that some of our most mission-aligned programs struggle the most in terms of enrolment. We continue to grow relationships with our Catholic School Board partners (e.g. a non-credit Certificate in Catholic Leadership that draws support from four local school boards who send educators and an in-progress reimagining of the Masters of Catholic Thought that might better meet the needs of educators in the Catholic system). The hope is that this partnership development will also benefit the undergraduate program if we can offer a program that clearly gives students who wish to be teachers an advantage in their subsequent teacher-education or ability to find employment.

Dean's Response (Arts)

We support our colleagues and will continue to provide administrative support to the programming.

Action 3: External financial sources should be sought to fund small elite programs / courses that are particular to St. Jerome's University's mission and identity

Undertake an initial campaign to raise \$40,000 to support students wishing to enroll in RS 349 for its travel-abroad offering.

Dean's Response (VPAD, St Jerome)

I have advised the program that while we will attempt to raise money in support of a travel abroad option for students, which would also benefit our Italian Studies minor, this is one of number of funding priorities and there is a limited donor base to draw from.

Dean's Response (Arts)

We concur with SJU's response.

Action 4: Support offering of RS 349 both in its on-campus and travel-abroad options

Offer RS 349 in the Spring 2026 semester in Rome. Explore donor support for students enrolled in travel-abroad option

Dean's Response (VPAD, St Jerome)

St. Jerome's would like to see this course offered though exact timing may be impacted by one of the initial course designers entering phased retirement and the success of fundraising initiatives.

Dean's Response (Arts)

We concur with SJU's response.

Action 5: Secure recognition among Ontario separate school boards of the Catholic Studies Minor as equivalent to the boards' required Catholic education modules for teachers

Approach the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association and the Canadian Catholic School Trustees' Association to negotiate recognition of the SJU Catholic Minor

Dean's Response (VPAD, St Jerome)

While these two entities would need to be supportive they are not the only actors that St. Jerome's has developed relationships with. We also partner with individual Catholic School Board Directors of Education, the Institute for Catholic Education (ICE), and the Bishop of Hamilton. Each of these entities can emphasize the value of the minor as a hiring asset.

Dean's Response (Arts)

We concur with our SJU colleagues on this point.

Action Plan Summary

ACTION	DETAILS AND RESOURCES REQUIRED	PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE
1. Keep Minor on the books.	Keep the Minor in the calendar: such a program is best kept on the books for an institution that identifies as Catholic.	The President, VPAD, and Chair of RS (SJU)	July 1, 2025-
2. Conduct a comprehensive review of the program in order to revise the program in relation to student engagement, available resources, and relation to SJU's Academic Plan	Coordinate a conversation involving all the stakeholders, including SJU department, Waterloo department, Dean of Arts.	The chair of the RS department, the proposed champions of the suite of courses and Minor, the VPAD, and the president.	September 1, 2025 to August 31, 2026
3. External financial sources should be sought to fund small elite programs / courses that are particular to St. Jerome's University's mission and identity	Undertake an initial campaign to raise \$40,000 to support students wishing to enroll in RS 349 for its travel-abroad offering.	President, VPAD, Advancement Office.	September 1, 2025 to August 31, 2027.
4. Support offering of RS 349 both in its on-campus and travel-abroad options.	Offer RS 349 in the Spring 2026 semester in Rome. Explore donor support for students enrolled in travel-abroad option.	VPAD, President, and Advancement Office as well as Norm Klassen and Chad Wriglesworth who offer the course.	September 1, 2025 to August 31, 2027.
5. Secure recognition among Ontario separate school boards of the Catholic Studies Minor as equivalent to the boards' required Catholic education modules for teachers.	Approach the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association and the Canadian Catholic School Trustees' Association to negotiate recognition of the SJU Catholic Minor.	President and VPAD.	September 1, 2025 to August 31, 2027.

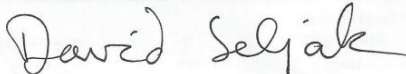
The Department Chair/Director, in consultation with the Dean of the Faculty shall be responsible for the Implementation Plan.


Date of next program review _____ **2032-2033**
Date

Signatures of Approval



Please keep this document in Word version. We do require you to sign it or demonstrate your approval. If you have issues with signing a Word document, please confirm your approval by adding the following wording when you send back the document by email "I hereby approve the attached document." We will collect formal signatures at a later stage on a pdf version.


November 11, 2025
Chair/Director Date


November 11, 2025
AFIW Administrative Dean/Head (For AFIW programs only) Date


February 4, 2026
Faculty Dean 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.


November 5, 2025
Associate Vice-President, Academic Date
(For undergraduate programs)