

Action Plan: Response to Report of the Review Committee on
Program in Religious Studies, University of New Mexico

Review committee: (1) Willemien Otten – Professor of the Theology and History of Christianity, The University of Chicago Divinity School, (2) Frederick M. Smith – Professor of Sanskrit and Classical Indian Religions, University of Iowa, (3) Patricia Risso – Professor, Department of History, University of New Mexico.

Site Visit: April 28-30, 2014

Committee Report: May 27, 2014

Receipt of Report from UNM APR Office: July 9, 2014

Date of this Response: October 7, 2014

Compiled by Prof. John Bussanich, Director of Religious Studies

Responses to Recommendations of the Review Committee

1. The Committee recommends that Lecturers and tenure-stream associate Faculty be encouraged to apply for external funding for outreach or public programming. It is unrealistic to ask RS Lecturers to apply for grants because they have heavy teaching loads and are not expected to pursue research programs. The RS Program has used its substantial EU account balances to fund programs and events and it will continue to do so. In Spring 2014 the RSP co-sponsored the prestigious Medieval Lecture Series (\$7500) and the Religion and Ecology Lectures (\$500), which featured lectures by members of Pueblo and other communities (Self-Study pp. 9 and 11). It should also be noted that the Program's outreach to local communities often does not require financial support. Prof. Katie Holscher, in her capacity as Chair of Catholic Studies, engages in various activities within the greater Albuquerque and northern New Mexico communities. Since joining the faculty in Fall 2012, Dr. Holscher has accepted invitations from various Catholic organizations and initiatives to talk on topics that are an extension of her scholarly interests within the study of Catholicism, and that are also of interest to Catholic adults within the Archdiocese of Santa Fe (Self-Study p. 10). If additional funding is

needed to support outreach activities to local communities, the Religious Studies Committee will explore grant possibilities, e.g. with the New Mexico Humanities Council and other non-sectarian funding agencies. At present, the RS Program feels actively engaged with its stakeholders both within and without UNM.

The Religious Studies Program regularly receives donations owing to its activities in the UNM community. Balances of these accounts range from \$1,000 - \$3,000. Presently, these are applied to undergraduate scholarships and guest speakers (Self-Study p. 47).

2. The Committee's recommendation to track RS graduates is constructive. We have begun to compile information on graduates' immediate plans and to request that they keep in touch and inform us about future career developments as part of the exit interviews the RS Program conducts in the Spring semester of each year. In order to aggregate information about RS graduates, the RS Director also will consult with Joann Comerford, A & S Development Coordinator, and Jeff MacNutt, Senior Director of Development.

3. The RSC strongly supports the Committee's recommendation that Faculty and Lecturers have a strong voice in governance of the program. The RSC and the current Director have expanded participation in governance of the Program during the past three years. Most importantly, all RS Lecturers were made members of the RSC in AY 2012-2013. Before then only one Lecturer served on the RSC. Also, the Director has maintained regular contact with Chairs and Faculty in A & S departments of American Studies, FLL, History, Philosophy, and Sociology. Especially valuable to me since I became RS Director have been the extensive and ongoing discussions about religious studies at UNM with Prof. Richard Wood, currently Chair of the Sociology Department.

4. The Committee's strongest recommendation is that the College invest resources in the RS Program in order to convert it into a Department over a five-year period. What it envisions is a multidisciplinary and secular course of the study of religion from historical, sociological, and

comparative perspectives. The Committee specifically recommends the appointment of three tenure-track faculty positions in one or more of the following fields: Native American religious traditions, South and/or East Asian religions, Middle Eastern religions (especially Islam), and Biblical or New Testament studies. Because the possibility of forming a Religious Studies Department is a distant prospect owing to financial constraints, the most effective strategy for implementing this recommendation, with which the RSC agrees, is to continue discussions with Departments in the College with an eye to appointing at least one assistant professor with a specialization in one of the areas mentioned. RS would contribute bridge funding. At the present time, the RSC has initiated discussions with departments in A & S about the possibility of supporting the appointment of a professor in the study of Religion and Sexuality, Global Islam, or Native American religions.