

Report on the Religious Studies Program (2014-15)

Below is a brief report about the state of the Religious Studies Program and what we have accomplished in the past year. Please know that all of this was a team effort. In particular, Tammy Proctor has been a consistent, resourceful, and creative partner in the Religious Studies Program.

Here is what we accomplished during the 2014-15 academic year:

1) Curriculum Review and New Major Requirements

We completed a full overhaul of the RS curriculum. This was the first curriculum review since the inception of the Program nearly a decade ago. A committee of six faculty members examined every aspect of the program, including required courses, language requirements, learning outcomes, course numbering, and the capstone. In order to collect data for the review, we commissioned a study of our program in comparison with Religious Studies Departments nationwide.

2) New Online Minor

Last year, we signed an agreement with RCDE to establish a new online minor in Religious Studies. In order to facilitate the minor, we have significantly increased our online course offerings, including regular courses in World Religions, Buddhism, Chinese Religions, and Judaism.

3) New Faculty Hires

We hired two new online instructors to teach courses in Buddhism, Judaism, Biblical Studies, and World Religions. The arrival of Danielle Ross as a tenure-track faculty member provided further depth to our Islam offerings. We also hired two postdocs who brought significant energy and creative teaching to the Program.

4) Broadening Leadership in Religious Studies

One of our goals last year was to broaden leadership and participation by our affiliated faculty members. We created two standing committees—the Curriculum Committee and the Events Committee—each consisting of five faculty members. This allowed for wider consultation on key decisions, greater buy-in from affiliated faculty, and delegation of responsibilities. I was surprised at how quickly the committee positions were filled; we have a very dedicated group of affiliated faculty!

5) Increased Course Offerings

The number of courses being offered for RELS credit and the number of students enrolled in RELS courses continued their upward march. Our faculty created several new courses, including Introduction to Judaism, Hindu Sacred Texts, Religion and Play, the Crusades, and Early Islamic History. We also cross-listed several courses for the first time.

6) **Alumni Survey**

In order to guide the future development of the Program, we participated in a national survey conducted by the American Academy of Religion. The survey reached out to our alumni, asking them what worked well and what could be improved about the major. The survey then compared us with Religious Studies programs nationwide, and USU performed favorably on nearly every measure.

7) **Programming and Events**

Thanks to generous funding from the Dean's office, and the dedicated efforts of Bonnie Glass-Coffin and the Events Committee, we were able to put on several well-subscribed events, including a faculty debate (which students loved!), a student trip to see the Dead Sea Scrolls at the Leonardo, and a lecture by sociologist of religion, Armand Mauss. We were also able to support the successful events of the USU Interfaith Initiative. The Events Committee adopted a set of guidelines for RS events, clarifying what kinds of events are appropriate for RS and what such events ought to accomplish.