

## Report on the Religious Studies Program

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Below is a brief report on the state of the Religious Studies Program and what we have accomplished in the past year. None of this would have been possible without the creative ideas and consistent support of our Department Head, Tammy Proctor, as well as our colleagues in the Religious Studies Program.

Here is what we accomplished during the 2015-16 academic year:

### 1. **Student Scholarships**

The Religious Studies Program inaugurated two scholarships of \$500 each for our majors—something that we plan to continue every year.

### 2. **New Faculty Position**

We hired a Temporary Assistant Professor of Religious Studies (Dr. Dominic Sur), thanks to support from our Department Head, Dean, and Provost. This new position was largely a result of consistently high enrollments in Religious Studies courses, particularly our world religions course (RELS 1010).

### 3. **Journal of Religious Studies**

The *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies* is, to our knowledge, the only peer-reviewed journal in our field dedicated to publishing student research and run primarily by students. This year, we initiated a major overhaul of the journal, by hiring a new editor (Christine Blythe), creating a more organized and sustainable editing internship for students, and advertising the journal to RS departments around the country. The resulting progress has been significant: the online journal received 14,332 downloads in the past 12 months.

### 4. **Fundraising Initiatives**

This past year we reinvigorated our fundraising endeavors in a significant way, by working closely with both the CHASS and central development teams and bringing together an advisory council of committed community members. The initial results have been quite promising.

### 5. **New Courses**

The number of courses being offered for Religious Studies credit and the number of students enrolled in our courses continued their upward march. Our faculty created several new courses, including Science and Religion, Intro to Judaism, The Historical Jesus, and Theory of Yoga. This last course was created in partnership with USU's new

Yoga Studies Program. We also cross-listed new courses with several departments.

**6. Partnership with SLCC**

We have created pathways for transfer students from Salt Lake Community College, whose Religious Studies offerings have increased considerably in the past year. We articulated course transfers and built partnerships with the faculty to encourage their students to consider a Religious Studies major at USU.

**7. Programming and Events**

Thanks to generous funding from the Dean's office and the dedicated efforts of the RS events committee, we were able to put on several well-subscribed events, including 1) a lecture by Douglas Johnston on religion and terrorism, spearheaded by Bonnie Glass-Coffin; 2) a panel on women's roles in Mormonism, historical and contemporary, organized by Susan Cogan and Philip Barlow in partnership with the Center for Women and Gender; 3) and a lecture on Science and Religion and a workshop on online teaching by John Crow, organized by Ravi Gupta. The Religious Studies Program was also closely involved in the annual Arrington Lecture as well as the Parliament of the World's Religions which came to Salt Lake in 2015.

**8. Assessment Tools**

We created assessment tools and criteria for the Religious Studies Program, which will soon go through an accreditation assessment. This included revised learning objectives, a new assessment plan, majors entry/exit surveys, and a RELS 1010 survey.

**9. Marketing Materials**

We created a new color booklet about the Religious Studies major to distribute to prospective students at campus events and orientations. The booklet was designed by Crystal Heroux in the Dean's Office with significant input from Mary Leavitt in Advising.

**Goals for the New Academic Year**

Looking forward to 2016-17, we would like to focus energies on the following goals:

- Build a partnership with the Wheatley Institution (housed at BYU), which hosts an annual, national workshop for students on Religion and International Affairs. Past attendees from our program have returned with a great sense of direction and passion for possibilities in their careers. We plan to expand this opportunity for more of our majors, including finding financial support for many of them.
- Continue to strengthen our fundraising initiatives.
- Build teaching capacity in areas where we have demand but no long term stability, such as Buddhism, Christianity, and Biblical Studies.