

Précis

Program Performance Review

Comparative Religion, BA

College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Paul J. Levesque, Ph.D., Chair

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Background

The Department of Comparative Religion conducted a program performance review during the 2010-11 academic year. The department's Self-study was completed and subsequently reviewed along with other documents by the Visiting Team. Members of the Visiting Team included Vivian –Lee Nyitray, Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Religious Studies, University of California, Riverside; Jon R. Stone, Associate Professor and Undergraduate Advisor, CSU, Long Beach; Leila Zenderland, Professor of American Studies, CSU-Fullerton. The team during their visit to the campus met with administrators, faculty members and students and followed up with a report of their findings and recommendations. The Chair of the Department provided a written response to the team report and the Dean of the College submitted a summary and recommendations report. The Self-study is noteworthy for its thorough response to the guidelines and particularly the alignment of University mission, goals and strategies with the goals and objectives of the department.

Key Data

There are five tenured/tenure track faculty in the department and no full-time lecturers, two are full professors (one with a joint appointment with Liberal Studies) and two associate professors and one assistant professor. Headcount data over the last seven years indicates steady growth in majors in 2003-04 the headcount was 34.5 and 2009-10 was 40.5. Throughout the seven year period under review the enrollments in the department grew by 19% as compared to the college which grew in FTES by nearly 9%. The number of majors has also grown with percentages on par or exceeding college and University rates. The department has steadily increased the numbers of degrees awarded in 2002-03 there were 9 degrees awarded by 2008-09 the number had risen to 24 and last year the number was 20.

Key Issues

The department of Comparative Religion offers a degree in Religious Studies. The department is committed to teaching the five major world religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. The faculty member whose expertise was in Jewish Studies has retired; the

department with the support of the Dean's office will search for a replacement. Increasing the number of majors and minors is a goal for the department one way to accomplish this, it was suggested, is to charter a chapter of Theta Alpha Kappa, the National Honor Society for Religious Studies. According to the Team Report there is mixed student opinion on the development of more online courses. The department might review its position on online offerings especially the consideration of adding introductory courses to an online format.

Outcomes Assessment

The department of Comparative Religion has made remarkable progress in the implementation of outcomes assessment and the document of student academic achievement. Importantly, an assessment plan is in place consisting of a time line to assess the program's learning goals and outcomes, which are linked (mapped) to curriculum and assessment strategies both direct and indirect are utilized including student survey data. And an indirect measure "Assessment Essay" is given to students in the capstone course. Rubrics have been developed and a capstone course is offered. Also, the department faculty have begun to use assessment data for change and improvement in the "closing the loop" phase of outcomes assessment. The department now should consider identifying quality indicators to assess departmental effectiveness not directly related to assessment of student learning. The question that would inform such indicators is - what are the hallmarks of a student earning the degree in Religious Studies. The Self-study alludes to potential indicators such as the number of graduates who go on to graduate school, and the application of technology in the curriculum.

Commendations are extended to the department of Comparative Religion for its advancement in assessment of student learning.

Outlook

The Visiting Team concluded that "our overall impressions of this department's activities are extremely positive". The Dean in her report stated "this is a healthy and thriving department with excellent leadership and dedicated members". The self-study indicates that a priority of the department is to stay abreast of all the academic trends in the field. Enrollments are strong and there is a dynamic curriculum that includes some online courses. An enlightened assessment plan is poised to provide significant information for the faculty about teaching, learning, effectiveness and guidance for improvement. Students indicate high satisfaction with the department and commend the careful advisement they receive. It is apparent that the department of Comparative Religion utilized the program performance review to reflect on its present and plan for the future and has revealed in the process a strong department with the wherewithal and potential to be even stronger.

Gerald W. Patton

Director of Assessment and Educational Effectiveness

