Program Progress Report

Institutional Quality Assurance Program (IQAP) Review

Religious Studies

Date of Site Visit: April 2023

Progress Report Prepared by: Celia Rothenberg

Please outline below how recommendations from the initial program review have been addressed. [Please fill in one table for each recommendation from the original Final Assessment Report]

Recommendation: value humanities and discursive social science in future strategic plan and vision documents (University)
Responsibility for Implementation: Department Chair
Anticipated Timeline for Completion: 2023-2026
Additional Notes/Commentary:
Progress (check one) ☐ Completed X In Progress ☐ Other (please explain)
Department's Comments: Emphasizing the value of the social sciences in the university's future strategic plan and vision documents is ongoing labour, undertaken at an array of locations and opportunities including, for example, at the bi-weekly Chairs and Directors meetings and other relevant forums.
Dean's Comments: Provost Tighe (and now incoming President) regularly re-affirms the importance of Humanities and Social Sciences amidst a broader environment that emphasises STEM. The development of a new university strategic plan in the coming years will provide an opportunity to stress the importance of these areas of scholarship to the university.
QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee): QAC reviewed this report and had no further comments or concerns

Recommendation: explore interdisciplinary programs that align with areas of research strength at McMaster and priorities of indigeneity and inclusive excellence (Department; Faculty of Social Sciences)
Responsibility for Implementation: Department Chair and GAC Chair
Anticipated Timeline for Completion: 2023-2026
Additional Notes/Commentary:
Progress (check one) ☐ Completed X In Progress ☐ Other (please explain)
Department's Comments: Religious Studies is engaged in ongoing consultation and brainstorming with graduate programs in Social Sciences and Humanities to collaborate and build upon areas of research strength. Specifically, Religious Studies has created the Islamic Studies Network (ISN), a group of faculty from departments in both Social Sciences and Humanities who share teaching and research interests in Islamic Studies. Members of the ISN are now associate members of the Department who can advise and serve as committee members for graduate students in the area. The department has also created a new area of graduate study, Theory Religion Politics (TRP), and deleted two areas (Religion and Politics, Western Religious Thought) which are no longer viable due to faculty retirements. The new TRP area includes faculty from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Faculty of Humanities who share research and teaching expertise in this area.
Dean's Comments: This has been an area of considerable focus for the current Chair of Religious Studies, with some notable success. In addition to those noted above, there have been efforts to reach out to health-oriented units at McMaster. There is more work to do, and this remains an on-going priority.
QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee): See above

Recommendation: explore the feasibility of a common MA application portal (Department)
Responsibility for Implementation: Graduate Administrator
Anticipated Timeline for Completion: 2023-2024

Additional Notes/Commentary:
Progress (check one) X Completed ☐ In Progress ☐ Other (please explain)
Department's Comments: Students apply to our graduate programs using Slate where they choose the one-year MA, two-year MA or PhD programs.
Dean's Comments: No comment.
QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee): See above

Recommendation: clarify (but do not necessarily change) the curriculum, not only for its own sake, but also to foreground the cross-field pollination that already occurs in the department (Department)
Responsibility for Implementation: GAC Chair
Anticipated Timeline for Completion: 2023-2024
Additional Notes/Commentary:
Progress (check one) ☐ Completed X   In Progress ☐ Other (please explain)
Department's Comments: Faculty members are well aware that, with the introduction of our one-year MA program specifically, and the decreased numbers of faculty in the Department generally, graduate seminars must be inclusive of students outside the specific sub-areas in which the seminars are offered. Our seminars are increasingly attuned to meeting the needs of our diverse cohort of graduate students.
Dean's Comments: In addition to the efforts noted above that reflect recent curriculum developments and their implications, the department should work on communicating clearly and regularly to students the options they have when completing their studies.

QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee): See above

Recommendation: form a consortium of institutions to ease barriers in language instruction for the programs' graduate students (Department; Faculty of Social Sciences)
Responsibility for Implementation: Department Chair
Anticipated Timeline for Completion: 2023-2025
Additional Notes/Commentary:
Progress (check one) ☐ Completed X In Progress ☐ Other (please explain)
Department's Comments: orming a consortium of institutions to offer language instruction continues to be bureaucratically complex. However, in the Spring/Summer 2025 terms Religious Studies is offering (online) Biblical Hebrew and Sanskrit, advertised as a "Summer Language Institute." Staff in the Department have worked very hard to advertise the availability of these courses and the possibility of using the Letter of Permission form by students from other Ontario universities to enrol in them. We are doing our best to move this project forward with the tools at hand.
Dean's Comments: The department is taking action in this area, as described above. This summer is the first attempt at this new approach. If it is not successful, the department will have to explore more formal arrangements with regional institutions to support advance language training.
QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee): See above

Recommendation: monitor the one-year MA degree's PLO and DLE's in relation to the two-year MA degree (Department)
Responsibility for Implementation: Department Chair, GAC Chair
Anticipated Timeline for Completion: Summer 2024

Additional Notes/Commentary:
Progress (check one) ☐ Completed X In Progress ☐ Other (please explain)
Department's Comments: Student feedback and faculty insights are key to monitoring the one-year MA degree's PLO and DLE's in relation to those of the two-year MA degree. Following the completion of our first cohort enrolled in the one-year MA, we invited staff from the MacPherson Institute to carry out a debrief with those students. As our second cohort is very small (1 student, due to an mid-term departure from the program, one student who moved into the two-year MA, and one student who moved directly into the PhD program), obtaining additional student and faculty feedback will take place next year (summer 2026).
Dean's Comments: No further comment.
QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee): See above

Recommendation: clarify the two-year MA project objectives and requirements (Department)
Responsibility for Implementation: GAC Chair
Anticipated Timeline for Completion: 2023-2024
Additional Notes/Commentary:
Progress (check one) ☐ Completed X In Progress ☐ Other (please explain)
Department's Comments: Clarifying the two-year MA project objectives and requirements is ongoing, particularly in light of the fact that we do not have any students utilizing this option in this or the previous academic year.
Dean's Comments:

Given the recency of the introduction of the one-year MRP-based MA, the department is still working through how best to position the two MA programs in complementary ways that serve distinct purposes and lead to different career paths. This is on-going work.

QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee):

See above

Recommendation: clarify and possibly revise the comprehensive exam goals and assessment format (Department)

Responsibility for Implementation: GAC Chair

Anticipated Timeline for Completion: 2023-2025

Additional Notes/Commentary:

Progress (check one)
☐ Completed
X In Progress
☐ Other (please explain)

Department's Comments:

The formats and goals of comprehensive exams for our graduate areas are under revision. The deletion of two graduate areas and the addition of one new area this academic year, as well as the recent addition of Islamic Studies and Jewish Studies areas in the past two academic years, has resulted in significant changes to our graduate program. Work on comprehensive exams' structure and format are taking place across these new areas, while established areas continue to be encouraged to revisit their requirements.

Dean's Comments:

No comment.

QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee):

See above

Recommendation: increase frequency of contact between the Graduate Chair and the Graduate Student Association for Religious Studies (GSARS), in the interest of developing programming that will help rebuild departmental community

Responsibility for Implementation: GAC Chair
Anticipated Timeline for Completion: 2023-2024
Additional Notes/Commentary:
Progress (check one) ☐ Completed X In Progress ☐ Other (please explain)
Department's Comments: Work to foster a positive and inclusive department community is ongoing. "Coffee hour chats" during which a faculty member speaks to interested students about their research are ongoing; GAC chair meets regularly with GSARS representatives. Over the past year, instead of organizing targeted graduate student events that risk being poorly attended, we are integrating graduate students into other departmental activities, e.g., undergraduate public events.We also work to recognize our graduate students' achievements; for example, we have recently hosted a book launch event to celebrate the publication of a student's book. Moreover, we regularly share information about campus events that could be of interest to our students promoting their participation in the faculty of social sciences activities and beyond.
Dean's Comments: This is an on-going challenge across the Faculty and the University due to the reduced presence of faculty (and, to a lesser degree, graduate students) in departments. Casual interactions are less likely to occur and therefore much be intentionally programed through the types of events identified in the Chair's response above.
QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee): See above

Recommendation: explore feasibility of new area structure for three-term MA *only* (Department)
Responsibility for Implementation:
Anticipated Timeline for Completion:
Additional Notes/Commentary:
Progress (check one) ☐ Completed ☐ In Progress X Other (please explain)

Department's Comments:
The three field structure is not relevant to the one-year MA, as there are no field-based course requirements. No action required.
Dean's Comments:
No comment.
QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee):
See above

Recommendation: keep CLA instructors of undergraduates who sustain fifth-year graduate-student funding (Department; Faculty of Social Sciences)
Responsibility for Implementation: Department Chair
Anticipated Timeline for Completion: Conclusion of CLA contracts
Additional Notes/Commentary:
Progress (check one) ☐ Completed ☐ In Progress ☐ Other (please explain)
Department's Comments: Fifth year graduate students are offered the opportunity to teach courses when possible via the Graduate Teaching Fellowships and sessional openings.
Dean's Comments: No comment.
QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee): See above

Recommendation: support the research mission of Religious Studies (and other humanities and social sciences) with adequate acquisitions of monographs and other relevant resources, including relevant subject area staff (University)
Responsibility for Implementation: Chair and Library Rep.
Anticipated Timeline for Completion:
Additional Notes/Commentary:
Progress (check one) ☐ Completed X In Progress ☐ Other (please explain)
Department's Comments: We continue to invite graduate students and faculty to request book/journal/other library acquisitions as appropriate; generally, these resource needs are well met.
Dean's Comments: In general, the library has been very responsive to requests submitted for acquisitions needed to support our research and graduate-training missions.
QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee): See above

Recommendation: create a professional development course for all entering MA and PhD students (Department)
Responsibility for Implementation: Chair of GAC
Anticipated Timeline for Completion: 2023-2024
Additional Notes/Commentary:
Progress (check one) X Completed ☐ In Progress ☐ Other (please explain)
Department's Comments: We strongly encourage graduate students to avail themselves of all resources for professional development offered through MacPherson. We also seek out and create opportunities for skills

development for our graduate students. For example, we have organized and participated teaching assistant workshops with other departments in order to pool resources and together create effective opportunities for our graduate students.

Dean's Comments:

The Faculty of Social Science believes that enhanced graduate professionalization and careers programming is essential. From the Faculty's perspective, it does not make sense to have each graduate program undertake its own professional development training in an uncoordinated manner. The Faculty of Social Sciences Associate Dean of Graduate Studies has been increasing professionalization training offered by the Faculty to students in all Social Science graduate programs (and for some events has also been working collaboratively with other Faculties at McMaster). This approach reduces unnecessary duplication, enables programming not possible for a single graduate program, and creates the benefits of greater interaction of graduate students across Social Science graduate programs. This Faculty-based programming can then be supplemented by program-specific programming that reflects considerations unique to a field.

QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee):

See above

Recommendation: enhance international graduate student support through a dedicated office and programs (University)

Responsibility for Implementation: Department Chair and Chair of GAC

Anticipated Timeline for Completion:

Additional Notes/Commentary:

Progress (check one)
X Completed
☐ In Progress
☐ Other (please explain)

Department's Comments:

This goal is difficult to achieve at this particular economic moment. When we admit international students we also offer those students additional information (that we have authored) regarding the costs of living in Hamilton as well as opportunities to connect to current graduate students in the program.

Dean's Comments:

The University has in recent years increased dedicated supports for international students (funded in part by an international student tax paid by Faculties). In addition, a staff member in the School of

Graduate Studies focuses on supporting international graduate students. While more can always be done, these resources represent a considerable investment by the university in supporting international students.

QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee):

See above