

# STRATEGIC PLAN

## Department of Religion Gustavus Adolphus College

May 2009

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### Section 1 Department Description

#### 1.1.1 Mission, vision, and goals

##### Mission

The program of the Department of Religion is designed to meet the needs of all students for a critical appreciation of religion as a basic aspect of human experience, of the Christian faith and its contemporary expressions, and of the methods appropriate to the study of religion.

Because the data of religion are so varied, its study involves the use of perspectives and methods from several fields, including the arts and foreign languages, social sciences and literature, history and philosophy. Thus the study of religion offers a unique opportunity for the type of integrated study that is desirable in a liberal arts education.

Currently, the Religion Department is staffed by nine tenured or tenure-track appointments, and three term appointments. Listed for Spring 2009 are 30 Religion majors (several additional students have not yet declared the major).

In concert with the mission of the College and the ideals of Lutheran higher education the curriculum of the Religion Department emphasizes studies of the Christian tradition and significant exposure to world traditions. On the basis of this framework for intellectual inquiry, the department is committed to:

1. Affirming and teaching the Western Christian Tradition, with particular attention to the Lutheran heritage. This Lutheran perspective implies a commitment to the “third path”<sup>1</sup>—a religious perspective that is neither sectarian nor non-sectarian, but one committed to an accurate grasp of the world and an inclusive engagement with the whole global community. Sustained by this perspective the department is also called and deeply committed to the exploration and teaching of non-Western, non-Christian traditions.

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<sup>1</sup> Darrell Jodock; The Third Path: Gustavus Adolphus College and the Lutheran Tradition

2. Excellence in scholarship and teaching in the tradition of the liberal arts with the recognition that teaching must be informed by scholarship—which in turn is informed by active research, writing, and speaking.

3. Fostering a “mature understanding of the Christian faith” that can embrace both difference and self-identity within the context of increased experience of religious and cultural plurality. To this end the department supports programs of international study that enhance such engagement, including but not limited to the incorporation of education abroad into our major. Likewise we are committed to the increased internationalizing of our curriculum. In all of these encounters the department recognizes its academic responsibility to students for the ongoing analysis required to make the experience of difference and identity coherent.

### Vision

Guided by its mission statement and building on its current strength in curricular offerings, the Religion Department envisions further development in four areas:

1. Enhancement of the Religion curriculum/major by a) expanding offerings in non-Western, non-Christian traditions; b) strengthening the Biblical curriculum; c) developing a more structured course sequence culminating in the Senior Thesis; d) focusing on interdisciplinary approaches to the study of religions; e) cultivating in students intercultural and inter-religious competency.
2. Continued and developing excellence in teaching and scholarship through increased and on-going support for faculty development.
3. Increased support for students majoring or minoring in Religion a) advising students in considering a vocation; b) fostering a sense of community among the majors; and c) increasing student diversity amongst majors/minors (ethnic, religious, etc.).
4. Strengthening the Religion faculty through a) an increase of ethnic/racial diversity in Department, and b) a clear articulation of what constitutes a “Lutheran presence” in the department.

### Goals

Corresponding to the areas stated above, the Religion Department will achieve the following goals:

1. While maintaining faculty resources in Christian theology and ethics, hire at least 2 additional faculty (total of 3 tenure-line positions) with competencies in other world religions; hire at least 1 additional faculty in Bible (total of 3 tenure-line positions) so that the Religion curriculum covers Hebrew Bible, the inter-testamental period and New Testament; with additional faculty, the Department will offer more upper-level courses in preparation for the Senior thesis; in future hiring, considering the methodological training of candidates for the position; working more closely with appropriate faculty from other departments; including more faculty from other departments in senior thesis advising (e.g., co-advising); integrating a semester or summer long study abroad or domestic program (with a focus on religion and/or culture) for majors in the Religion curriculum for;

- offering more courses or incorporate in existing courses more inter-religious components, e.g., interfaith dialog.
2. Request more funding for travel to professional conferences; establish an annual on-campus seminar for Religion faculty that will focus on a significant topic; institute a 4<sup>th</sup> year leave (semester) and a rotating post-tenure semester leave (above and beyond regular leaves--with an increase of faculty in the department it would be possible to cover areas for colleagues on leave with no additional cost to the College); in concert with GTS, develop more educational opportunities for faculty who wish to utilize technological resources and tools for pedagogical and research purposes.
  3. Improve graduate school advising for Religion majors; establish an advisory program for students considering ministry/church leadership; establish a regularized retreat for Religion majors lead by tenure-line Religion faculty; partner with the Office of Diversity Development and Multicultural Programs and Center for International and Cultural Education to identify potential majors/minors from ethnically and religiously diverse backgrounds.
  4. An increased presence of persons of color in the Department through prioritizing diversity in sub-disciplinary hiring and/or opportunity hiring; clear hiring criteria to maintain/strengthen Lutheran presence, especially in the areas of theology and ethics.

## 1.2 Programs

### Religion Department Program

Major in Religion

Minor in Religion

### Contributions to other academic programs

First Term Seminar: The Religion Department regularly contributes to First Term Seminars, averaging two to four FTS sections per year.

January IEX courses: on average, the Department offers 2-3 courses in January

Curriculum II: Religion faculty contribute to the following CU II courses:

CUR-120	The Individual and Morality (occasionally)
CUR-140	The Biblical Tradition (every fall)
CUR-399	Senior Seminar (occasionally)

Japanese Studies

REL 235	Zen and Japanese Culture
REL 355	Buddhist Philosophy

Business

EM 251	Ethics in Business and Economics
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Classics

GRE 202	The Greek New Testament
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LALACS

REL 244	God and Globalization
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REL 273 Religion and Politics in Latin America  
 REL 344 Liberation Struggles in the Two-thirds World  
 Medicine and Health Sciences  
 REL 243 Ethics and Medicine  
 Peace Studies  
 REL 115 World Religions  
 Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies  
 REL 250 Women and the Bible  
 REL 262 God and Gender  
 REL 282 Perspectives on Evil, Sin, and Suffering

### Contributions to General Education requirements

The Religion Department contributes to the College's general education requirements as well as to interdisciplinary programs. Listed by totals, we provide the following general education courses:

ARTS	1 200-level
THEOL	6 100-level; 1 200-level
LARS	2 200-level
HIPHI	1 100-level; 11 200-level; 6 300-level
SOSCI	2 100-level
NWEST	1 100-level; 6 200-level; 1 300-level
WRITI	5 FTS; 1 200-level
WRITD	4 200-level; 5 300-level

### **1.3 Support relationships**

Given the interdisciplinary nature of the study of religion, the Department relies on a number of departments and programs (courses cross-listed or that count toward the major):

1. Art/Art History: ART 239 "Art of the Middle Ages"
2. Political Science: POL 235 "Religion and Politics in American"
3. Soc/Anthropology: S/A 259 "Anthropology of Religion"
4. Classics: GRE 202 "Greek New Testament"
5. Office of International and Cultural Education
6. Center for Vocational Reflection

## **Section 2 Strategic Review**

### **2.1 Strategic Issues**

In the spring of 2008 the Religion Department completed a 10 year review which included a self-study, an external review, and a department retreat. The review and subsequent departmental discussions are the background of the following analysis.

### Departmental strengths

All department members are committed to the Lutheran character of the institution especially the Lutheran perspective on higher education, and subscribe to the theological and ethical core of the Religion curriculum. Department colleagues also recognize the essential role that biblical study and the study of world faiths plays in the Religion major. Strong support for international study and inter-religious dialog is evident in the department, as is the commitment to and involvement in the College's interdisciplinary programs.

### Departmental weaknesses

Departmental weaknesses include the following: only one tenure-line faculty member in the area of world religions; only one tenure-line faculty member who is a person of color; no consensus on what number of Lutherans needed to sustain a "Lutheran presence" in the department; need for a more intentional incorporation of study abroad in the Religion curriculum.

### Opportunities (external)

There is some evidence that our society recognizes the importance of the study of religion for understanding world/global events; there is an increased student interest in the study of religion; over the last 20 years graduate programs focusing on non-Western, non-Christian religions have increased.

### Challenges (external)

Increasingly students, with a Christian background or who claim Christianity as their faith, arrive at college with very little or no understanding of Christianity; biblical literacy is almost non-existent (the lack of knowledge of both Christianity and the Bible means more class time spent on rudimentary issues); less development of critical reading, research and writing skills—corresponding to an increase in on-line/internet activity; increasing demand for courses in non-Christian, non-Western traditions (a positive sign, but a challenge nonetheless); graduate programs geared toward specialization and research, rather than teaching and intellectual community/general knowledge.

## **2.2 Barriers**

Because the Religion department serves many programs (see section 1.2), there is little room for revising/modifying the major. For example, the department would like to see more sequencing of courses (a 100-level course would be required for a 200-level, etc.); however, many upper-level courses also serve other majors and, for those students, prerequisites would not work. A second issue is support for faculty research; for example, a more frequent leave schedule (as proposed in section 1.1.1, under Goals, number 7). Another issue as relates to future hiring is the need for a clearer understanding and consensus about diversity.

### **Section 3 Strategic Initiatives and Recommendations**

To achieve Goal One and support the College's Strategic Initiatives 1.1, 3.1, 4.1, 4.2, we will:

- a. Hire two additional faculty with competencies in world religions.
- b. Hire at least one additional faculty in Bible.
- c. Offer additional 200 and 300 level courses in all areas.
- d. Invite faculty in other disciplines to co-advise senior theses.
- e. Offer additional 200 or 300 level courses focused on inter-religious issues and dialogue.
- f. In concert with the Center for International and Cultural Education, develop religion specific programs, both international and domestic, primarily for Religion majors and offer financial assistance for Religion majors who participate in this program.
- g. Integrate study abroad experiences for Religion majors through the creation of specific post-study courses and/or the development of an Intercultural Integration Area.

To achieve Goal Two and support Strategic Initiatives 1.1, 2.4, and 2.5, we will:

- a. Establish annual on-campus seminary for Religion faculty led by a well-known teacher/scholar.
- b. Institute a fourth year semester leave.
- c. Institute a rotating post-tenure semester leave above and beyond regular leaves.
- d. Increase support for travel to conferences and seminars.
- e. Designate a GTS representative to aid faculty members in utilizing technology in both research and teaching.

To achieve Goal Three and support Strategic Initiatives 1.2, 1.5, 2.4, 2.5, 3.1, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, and 5.1 we will:

- a. Establish and fund an annual retreat for Religion majors.
- b. Partner with the Office of Diversity Development and Multicultural Programs and Center for International and Cultural Education to identify potential majors/minors from ethnically and religiously diverse backgrounds.
- c. Support the role of an academic advisor for students pursuing 1) graduate study in Religion; 2) church professions; 3) support a leadership co-curricular program for students pursuing church ministry with the Chaplain's Office, the Center for Vocational Reflection and the Office of Church Relations.

To achieve Goal Four and support Strategic Initiatives 3.1, 4.1 and 4.2 we will:

- a. Prioritize diversity in sub-disciplinary hiring and/or opportunity hiring.
- b. Clarify hiring criteria to maintain/strengthen Lutheran presence, especially in ears of theology and ethics.

#### **Section 4      Assessment**

To Assess Goal One we will:

- a. Hold departmental discussions to assess the effectiveness of course sequencing for the senior thesis.
- b. Include in the Religion department retreat a discussion period to assess the quality of student research and writing for the senior thesis; copies of previous years' theses will be consulted for purposes of comparison.
- c. Utilize the senior exit interview and survey in order to assess students' perceptions of how well they are prepared for the senior thesis.
- d. Institute regular meetings with Religion major advisors from other departments to assess the effectiveness of interdisciplinary advising.
- e. Utilize the senior exit interview and survey in order to assess student perceptions of interdisciplinary advising.
- f. Utilize intercultural competency surveys and instruments to assess the effectiveness of study abroad integration in the major.
- g. Utilize the senior exit interview and survey in order to assess student "literacy" regarding inter-religious issues.

To Assess Goal Two we will:

- a. Hold departmental meetings to discuss research objectives and trajectories.
- b. Hold departmental discussions on whether or not these objectives have been met, and what obstacles to research exist.
- c. Hold departmental discussions on the implementation of new technologies in teaching and research; assess the effectiveness of these new technologies.

To Assess Goal Three we will:

- a. Utilize senior exit interviews and surveys to assess the effectiveness of graduate school, seminary, and church leadership advising.
- b. Hold departmental discussion focusing on placement in graduate and seminary programs over several years to track the number of placements and number of different programs to which Religion graduates are admitted.
- c. Conduct regular surveys to track ethnic and religious diversity amongst religion majors.

To assess Goal Four we will:

- a. Determine whether we have increased our diversity through sub-disciplinary hiring and/or opportunity hiring.
- b. Determine whether we have clarified hiring criteria to maintain/strengthen Lutheran presence, especially in ears of theology and ethics.