

## **Summary - Intentional Interdisciplinarity: Instituting Religion across the Curriculum at Southern Methodist University**

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**Presenting Questions:** The Department of Religious Studies wanted to identify, articulate, and add value to the teaching of religion in global contexts and across disciplines and schools in the university. Put another way, we wanted to learn where we fit, how we were perceived, and how to better cooperate with others to offer a more comprehensive curriculum for our students, and for those coming from other departments.

**What we did:** We held a series of lunches with chairs from departments with similar academic interests to ours (“affinal” departments), program heads, and then administrative stakeholders to ascertain how faculty perceive religious studies as adding to their curricular goals, and to better understand what courses that they offer that may be good for our students. We also interviewed our majors and minors about our courses, and conducted institutional research focused on understanding our students.

As a result we took the following actions: **1.** We retitled and refocused our introductory World Religions class, which had been called, “Ways of Being Religious,” as “Religious Literacy.” That change went into effect for Fall 2017, and both sections filled. **2.** We created a digital and paper flier advertising the department and our classes based on the strengths students highlighted, and also on comments they made about why people may not take classes with us. **3.** We contacted alumni and had them make 2-minute videos in which they talk about how the major or minor helped them in their current occupation. Those videos are now available on our department website. **4.** We updated our course catalogue to reflect recently added courses, and to archive courses unlikely to be taught. We made copies of the course list and major requirements in a form easily accessible to students and faculty across campus. **5.** We revived our Religious Studies Club, which had been dormant for several years. **6.** We crafted five “paired majors,” or roadmaps to completing a double major, with History, English, Psychology, Education, and Philosophy. In all but the education paired major, students will be able to count up to 2 courses from a predetermined list toward both majors. **7.** We produced fliers for each of the paired majors which will be placed in both home departments, on department websites, and run as advertisements on media screens across campus. **8.** We proposed a change to the Religious Studies major based on benchmarking comparisons, and in conversation with the university registrar, the director of Dedman Records, the Undergraduate Curriculum advisor, the Associate Provost in charge of developing a new curriculum for the university, and an administrative assistant who handles curricular matters in Dedman College. The change in the major would have allowed a universal “drop” of two Religious Studies electives for ANY student with another major. This was killed at the college level as administrators felt that it would amount to a 24-hour major, and also that it would amount to two separate majors as some students would only need 24 hours to graduate, while others (those with no second or third major) would require 30. SACS, our accrediting agency, does allow for a 24-hour major, so discussion is ongoing about the possibility of expanding our proposal to include all students who double major under the curriculum currently being developed. **9.** We created a Director of Undergraduate Studies position, new for the department, to continue to work on the major, advise students, and liaison with administration.

**What we Learned:** First and foremost, we learned that while we are well-respected on campus as a department for teaching and research, no one knows what we actually do. We also learned much more about who our students are, when they declare, and why some students are afraid of taking classes with us. In addition, we learned how to better market and adapt our courses and curriculum so they mesh more easily with others, especially for the majority of our students who double major. Perhaps most optimistically, we learned that there is a genuine hunger for this kind of cooperation on campus. More pessimistically, real structural change is exceedingly difficult.