

**UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA  
WABASH GPTI  
SUMMATIVE REPORT  
FEBRUARY 2014**

On December 11-12, 2013, the Doctoral Program in Religious Studies at the University of Ottawa held a successful and inspiring consultation under the auspices of the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion. The results are summarized below.

*Challenges faced by our alumni*

The major challenge facing our alumni/a is employment. None of those who attended are in full-time, tenure-stream teaching positions. All, however, have had and/or currently have at least some part-time teaching opportunities, and at least two have satisfying university positions that include some teaching on a post-secondary level, though not necessarily in the field of religious studies. Despite their employment frustrations, however, the attendees expressed their ongoing belief in the value of their education and the enjoyment and satisfaction they experience in their varied teaching roles.

As teachers, they also experience some challenges. The two that stood out concern teaching effectively in large lecture courses and managing electronic communications. In the latter category they included a) the constant distractions – to themselves, others, and the instructors – of students who are constantly on their laptops or phones or other devices, b) expectation that instructors will respond immediately to emails sent by their students at all hours of the day or night.

*How they benefited from our program*

The alumni/a commented on the valuable experience that they gained from the opportunity to teach a course in the latter years of their doctoral programs. Those who had other teaching opportunities, particularly for supervised teaching of an “arc” (series of several lectures) were very grateful for those opportunities as well. Some also expressed their gratitude for mentoring that they had received from their supervisors or other faculty with regard to course design and lecture preparation.

*Recommendations for the future*

The consultation generated a number of concrete recommendations that the Department hopes to pursue over the coming year or two.

Informal measures that can be implemented within the Department

1. Ensure appropriate mentorship for teaching and grading.
2. Create opportunities for supervised teaching, which can provide constructive criticism for TAs and opportunities for faculty to write teaching recommendations. This might be done through team-teaching.

3. Provide guidance and experience in course development and syllabus creation.
4. Create opportunities for doctoral students to observe faculty in their roles as undergraduate teachers.
5. Work with the Religious Studies Graduate Student Association to create a series of informal workshops on matters of professional interest to doctoral students. The RSGSA has undertaken to gather suggestions from its members and approach faculty members to facilitate these workshops. It is anticipated that these workshops will cover topics such as CV preparation, cover letters, and interviewing skills, among others.
6. Create a mechanism for matching students who wish to teach with faculty who are able and willing to supervise them in relevant courses.
7. Create a mechanism that will permit interested students to observe faculty members teach undergraduate courses and to reflect on their observations in terms of their own teaching.

Measures that will need further discussion within the Department and with the Faculty of Arts

1. Regularize the teaching opportunities available to TAs. It was noted that at other universities such as McMaster, McGill and the University of Toronto, teaching assistants taught or led discussion groups (“tutorials”) one hour per week. Our alumni/a believe that such experience would have helped them feel better prepared to take full responsibility for their own courses. It was suggested that the new University initiative on hybrid courses might create some opportunities for more meaningful TA experiences.
2. Create a graduate course on teaching along with more formalized teaching opportunities. Thought might be given to a diploma or some other official recognition that could be included on a transcript and/or within letters of recommendation.
3. Reconfigure all or part of the comprehensive examinations to include the creation of syllabi as part of the intellectual exercise of gaining comprehensive knowledge of the field.