UCC Program Review Committee summary of review

Program – Department of Classics & World Religion

This program includes the following degrees, minors, and certificates:

- B.A. Classics (HTC)
- B.A. Classical Civilization
- B.A. World Religions
- B.A. Classical Languages
- Classical Civilization minor
- World Religions minor
- Latin minor
- Greek minor
- Islamic Studies certificate

Recommendation

This program is found to be viable, see report for commendations, concerns, and recommendations.

Date of last review – AY 2007

Date of this review – AY 2017

This review has been sent to the chair and the dean, their joint response is attached.
Program Review—Ohio University Department of Classics and World Religions

Report Submitted—November 2016

Committee Members, Internal: Dorothy Sack (Geography); Geoffrey Dabelko (Environmental Studies)
Committee Members, External: Awad Halabi (Wright State); Deborah Lyons (Miami University)

Summary Assessment:

Classics and World Religions (CLWR) is a viable program at Ohio University. The department brings fundamental as well as specialized elements of a quality liberal arts education to students at Ohio University in a thoughtful and engaging manner. The CLWR faculty members maintain active and evolving research agendas. Their participation in important service roles especially at the college and university levels is substantial, and the quality of those contributions has brought them a campus-wide reputation for excellence.

1. Program as a Whole:

   A. Faculty size and distribution. At present, the number and distribution of faculty is sufficient to carry out the broad overall mission of the department in teaching, research, and service. The department provides an excellent level of intellectual challenge and individual attention to its students. Having sufficient faculty resources to carry out its mission has depended on some humbly-funded overload teaching of Greek and Latin, and development of new educational strategies. For example, CLWR is to be commended for instigating a program of course-sharing small, advanced language classes via teleconferencing with Miami University's Classics Department.

   The faculty size has set some limits on the curriculum. At the current staffing level, the department has only been able to offer text-based courses in Judaism and Christianity and not a parallel course in the Koran. Likewise, CLWR has not been able to offer introductory courses on the evolution and practice of Judaism and Christianity over the centuries, which would serve world religion majors and minors as well as the general undergraduate population. While some of these courses, particularly on Judaism, exist in the Department of History, they have rarely been offered in recent years. Upcoming retirements among the classics faculty will likely create additional challenges in the near future.

   B. RSCA. The faculty exhibits an impressive level of research, scholarship, and creative activity. These are dedicated scholars and active researchers, who are well published and engaged in ongoing, exciting, meaningful, evolving research agendas. Levels of external research support for their research seems appropriate.

   C. Service. The department has developed a culture that includes a strong commitment to service to the university, community, and profession. Service to the college and university has been particularly impressive in amount and quality.

   D. Resources.

      1. Facilities. Housed in Ellis Hall, the department's physical facilities are in serious need of improvement and modernization. Fortunately, this should be accomplished with the renovation of Ellis Hall, scheduled for next year.

      2. Library Resources. The CLWR faculty have excellent library resources and an excellent relationship with staff at Alden Library.

      3. Staff. The department has one staff member, administrative associate Bryan Baur. By all accounts, he is doing an excellent job, and, like the rest of the department, seems to be very dedicated. Our committee was impressed by his energy, thoughtfulness, and organizational skills.
4. **Financial and Technological Resources.** Additional financial resources would help the department overcome three main obstacles. First, some faculty are currently compensated for overload teaching of advanced Latin and Greek, which are necessary in a classics program, by as little as the very low amount $1000 for a semester-long class. We would like to see this amount increased and would urge that the Executive Vice President and Provost’s FY 2017 Overload Teaching Rates are followed. Second, the department needs the means for funding advanced students (or graduate students from related programs) to serve as discussion leaders for the very popular Difficult Dialogs course. Third, to continue and grow other creative means for sharing courses between classics departments at other universities, such as is currently undertaken with Greek between OU and Miami University, the department needs access to increased communication technology capabilities. These needed investments likely extend beyond a given department’s resources and should be coordinated at the college level to facilitate innovation and expansion of curriculum delivery goals across campus. We encourage the department to apply to internal and external funding sources for the course-related needs, but the successful and innovative strategies merit some level of guaranteed support from the college so that these strategies can continue in years when educational and technology grants may not be received.

2. **Undergraduate Education:**

   **A. Service Courses.** Classics and World Religions offers popular courses that satisfy the university’s general education (tier II) requirements as well as courses that satisfy language and College of Arts and Sciences humanities distribution requirements. Specifically, the department offers 18 courses that satisfy tier II humanities and literature requirements and ten courses that count in the tier II cross-cultural perspectives category. Greek and Latin fulfill language requirements. Almost all courses in the department provide College of Arts and Sciences humanities area credit for non-majors. Online formats exist for some of these courses. Thus, the department is playing a significant role in general education and liberal arts requirements for non-majors. By focusing on basic intellectual skills, such as textual analysis, critical thinking, logic and reasoning, discussion, and fundamental tenets of various cultures, the classes are contributing well to preparing non-majors for future coursework in this and most other disciplines as well as helping students gain necessary skills to become thoughtful and engaged citizens.

   Classical civilization, classical archaeology, and world religions courses are listed by the course abbreviations CLAS, CLAR, and CLWR, respectively. In order to make it easier for students to discover world religions courses, a more direct abbreviation could be used such as REL for example.

   The Jewish Studies Certificate program has been largely inactive since the retirement of history Professor Marvin Fletcher. Courses are not regularly being offered for years at a time. CLWR could be instrumental in helping to revive this certificate, considering the importance of biblical studies in the department. Students have expressed interest in revitalization of the certificate as well as language offerings in Hebrew.

   **B. Nature of Student Majors.** The department directly mentors about 25 majors and many minors, of some ethnic diversity. The majors are about equally divided between classics and world religions. The quality of students in OU’s CLWR program is high, and boasts a steady stream of HTC students. Many CLWR students double major, and many complete senior theses.

   The number of majors in the department fell slightly with the change to semesters and has not yet rebounded. Some decrease in humanities majors overall has occurred across the country in the last couple of years, as a response to economic trends. Students in the world religions major is expected to increase over the next several years because of world events and the need to better understand the diversity of world cultures.

   The department works to attract additional majors and non-majors through its community presence on campus. Faculty participate in the Arts and Sciences themes activities, guest lecture, and give public lectures, all of which help general students and potential majors become aware of the department and its offerings.
C. **Preparation for Post-Graduate Opportunities.** The undergraduate curriculum provides majors with an adequate background to pursue discipline-related careers or graduate work following graduation. Students interested in Judaism and Christianity receive sound training in the textual approach, but are not able to receive as full a background in the nontextual approach to these subjects.

D. **Resources for the Undergraduate Program.** The department is currently able to provide sufficient support for the undergraduate program and advising needs, but it would be beneficial to majors and non-majors if the department could expand or bolster specific parts of the curriculum.

1. **Advising.** Due to the modest number of majors, the Classics and World Religions faculty are able to provide considerable advising attention to their majors. They take advising very seriously, and serve as mentors to their advisees. Because faculty members have a small number of major advisees, they are well positioned to be active in the college and university programs for advising students who are currently undecided about a major.

2. **Judaism and Christianity Courses.** Currently, Hinduism and Islam are taught through introductory and upper-level courses that examine them as living, diverse, and evolving religious practices, but Judaism and Christianity are not. The undergraduate students we met also raised this issue and expressed considerable interest in taking religion classes that examine the growth and development of Christianity and Judaism.

3. **Language Offerings.** CLWR offers the B.A. degree, which requires students to take two years of a single language. Ideally, students should take the language that best supports their interests and postgraduate goals. Two years of Greek and Latin are taught within the CLWR department; advanced courses are generally taught as an overload. Other languages on campus are offered through either the Department of Linguistics or the Department of Modern Languages. The world religions program would especially benefit from consistent offerings on campus of two years of instruction in Arabic and Hebrew. These are currently taught on an ad hoc basis when someone, such as a graduate student from a different department or a community member, is available to teach these languages. We urge the university to invest in Group II instructors to teach these languages on a regular basis. Arabic will likely continue to grow in popularity as a foreign language option among Ohio University students in general. Given the importance of biblical studies to the CLWR department, it would be most helpful for the university to offer Hebrew consistently as well.

The committee was heartened by expressions of support by both Dean Bob Frank and Associate Provost Howard Dewald for the continued teaching of Ancient Greek, despite small enrollments. Given the centrality of this subject for the field of classics, it is concerning that we were told that this subject might be covered in the future (when the current faculty retire) by non-tenure track faculty. We urge the university to commit to the continued support of classics at Ohio University.

4. **Study Abroad.** The department encourages its students to undertake applied or field experiences as offered through the Ohio University Office of Global Opportunities, and the CLWR students are highly motivated to do so. The students, however, expressed to our committee some frustration around studying abroad and their interactions with the Office of Global Opportunities. Areas of concern included lining up opportunities and receiving appropriate credit for courses. Although these challenges are not something that the CLRW faculty can necessarily control, it is something that adversely affects their students that they need to be aware of.

E. **Pedagogy.**

1. **Pedagogical Approaches.** CLWR faculty impressed us with their thoughtful and varied approach to pedagogical practices. They ask their students to read, reflect, analyze, reason, discuss, debate, hypothesize, write, edit, explain, and more. They have creative and interesting assignments that involve active and experiential learning.
2. **Assessment of Student Learning.** The department has established a thoughtful and longitudinal program for assessing student learning. Representative papers and projects are saved in the form of a student portfolio that demonstrates student learning and intellectual maturation. Graduating students also take an exit exam that assesses the breadth and depth of their knowledge in their major subject.

3. **Teaching Evaluation.** Faculty take their teaching mission seriously and thoughtfully review student comments and responses on course evaluations. The consistently high evaluations reflect the dedication and capability of the CLWR faculty.

3. **Other Considerations:**

   A. **Salary Compression.** A review of salary versus years in service could help alleviate faculty concerns about salary compression. The college and university should be aware of the difficulties that can result when a new faculty member is brought in at a higher salary than faculty already on board who have more years of service.

   B. **Pre-Tenure Course Reduction.** A semester of pre-tenure leave should be established as a departmental standard, rather than being left to an incoming faculty member to negotiate, or not, on their own. This is standard practice at many institutions.

   C. **Course Scheduling.** The department should consider adopting a rotating system so all who are interested are able to teach on schedules most supportive of freeing up adequate blocks of time for research.
Date: November 28, 2016

TO: David Ingram, Program Review Committee

FROM: Robert Frank, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences & William Owens, Chair, Classics and World Religions

RE: Seven year review of Classics and World Religions

This is our joint response to the 2016 report submitted for the Department of Classics and World Religions seven year program review.

In our view the committee has provided an accurate appreciation of the CLWR faculty’s contribution, in their teaching, research, and service, to the missions of the College of Arts and Sciences and Ohio University. The committee commended the college’s support of the Difficult Dialogues courses and pedagogical model. The department, with the support of the college, will consider courses in which this model might be applied further; for example, the “What is Evil” course.

The committee commended the administration’s support, both at the dean’s and provost’s level, for the teaching of Ancient Greek. The department is grateful for this support and our efforts to make the teaching of Ancient Greek sustainable. The department and college will work together as we develop approaches to keep Ancient Greek accessible to a new generation of Ohio University students. The committee also offered the department and college a number of suggestions:

The committee expressed concern that Classics faculty teach advanced Latin and Greek as an overload, in acknowledgement of which they receive a $1000 stipend. The committee suggested that the faculty who teach these courses be compensated at the regular overload rate. However, given the very low enrollments of these courses, the current arrangement is the only sustainable option.

The committee recommended that the World Religions program offer courses in Judaism and Christianity in their historical perspective in addition to the current textually oriented courses on the Old Testament and New Testament. The new courses would complement the historical perspective courses in Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Although desirable, this approach to the curriculum would be difficult to achieve given current staffing levels.

The committee recommended that the college invest in Group II funding to enable the teaching of Hebrew and Arabic on a regular basis. This option may be explored but must fit into a broader discussion of the language offerings of the university.

The committee indicated that CLWR could be instrumental in reviving the Jewish Studies Certificate, an idea that may be explored by the department.
The committee noted a concern regarding new hires and the possibility of salary compression relative to continuing faculty. The department and college will continue to observe the practice of preventing a situation in which new faculty would be hired at a higher salary than current faculty.

The committee recommended that all probationary faculty in CLWR be granted a semester of pre-tenure leave rather than have this be a matter of negotiation. This suggestion will be considered further in the context of future hiring.