

**Comprehensive Program Review**  
**for**  
**The Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies**  
**Valdosta State University**  
**Spring 2009**

**Section I—General Program Information**

**I. Introduction**

Create a program overview which includes basic information about the program, including date of origination, program purpose, mission, and structure, tracks and concentrations offered, accreditation garnered, and the program's overall relation to VSU's mission and strategic plan.

The Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies is a diverse department with a dual-track major program that leads to a B. A. degree with a major in Philosophy and Religious Studies and a concentration in either Philosophy or Religious Studies. We also offer three minor programs, one in philosophy, one in religious studies, and one in professional and applied ethics.

Students who concentrate in Philosophy study a broad spectrum of ideas, thinkers, issues and arguments. Philosophy challenges students to think critically and express themselves effectively. The philosophy curriculum addresses the key questions from a variety of areas: the history of philosophy, reasoning and argumentation, ethics, philosophy of science, philosophy of mind, social and political theory, and aesthetics. The Department of Philosophy also offers a variety of special topics courses that address issues of interest to philosophers. Our special topics courses are concerned with a range of issues; previous courses have addressed the work of one particular figure in the history of philosophy, or a philosophical interpretation of modern cultural trends. All philosophy students are encouraged to develop an appreciation for lifelong learning and the richness of culture and intellectual history. Philosophy also provides a foundation for students to become positive contributors to our society.

Students who concentrate in Religious Studies investigate the diversity of religious thought and practice from multicultural perspectives, exploring how religion shapes values, norms, and public policies in societies worldwide. The religious studies courses encourage multiple disciplinary approaches toward religious expression, whether in art, literature, politics, social conflict, language, history, or gender studies. The overarching goal is to understand the meaning of religion, with sympathetic insight into religious communities, and to analyze the dynamic influences of religion on social development and cultural transformation throughout history and around the globe. The religious studies curriculum provides students the freedom to shape their coursework around their own interests in religion. Religious Studies enables students to communicate effectively with people from diverse cultural and religious traditions in the spirit of world citizenship.

In the early years, the department functioned as a “service-oriented” department for other areas

of the university. This meant that large numbers of courses were taught by departmental faculty outside of the department and the priority tended to be the promotion of these outside disciplines. This service orientation, though a very successful endeavor on its own, led to a lack of concentration on cultivating the department as a major area of study within its own right. During this time, all religious studies courses were offered as Philosophy coursework, and the courses themselves tended to be focused primarily on Western theological traditions. In the mid 1990s, however, there was an increase in Philosophy majors and graduates. For example in 1995, the department graduated nine majors and in 1997 there were fifteen majors who graduated. But in the late 1990s and early 2000s the numbers began to decline. As the Philosophy major began to dwindle, Religious Studies--which was only a minor in the department--began to attract students. As a result of the 2001 Comprehensive Program Review, the curriculum of the Department was re-organized as a two track major which brought new vitality to the program. The faculty in the department took responsibility for the autonomous direction of the program and with renewed energy and the growing charisma of recent hires and the hard work and steady leadership of experienced faculty the program entered a period of unprecedented growth. In the Summer of 2006, the Board of Regents approved the name change of the program to now include religious studies--hence the new title of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies. That same summer, the department was able to add a full time department head after five years of interim heads. In 2007 the department revised its two track major and the minor in Religious Studies. In the Fall of 2008, despite an economic downturn, the department was able to add a new lecturer position which strengthened offerings in both Philosophy and Religious Studies and added to the diversity of the departmental faculty and that of the university.

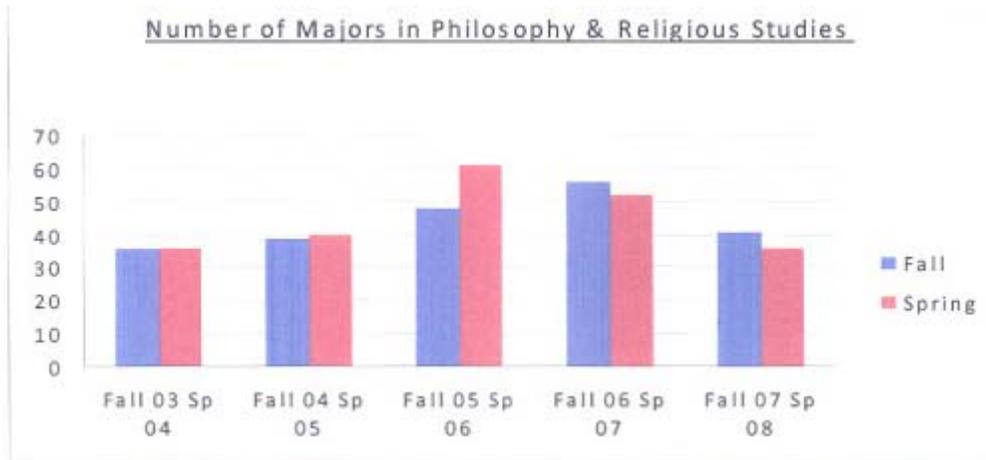
The department extends the University mission of service to its region through excellence in programming by offering two programs of study--the philosophy track and religious studies track--which challenge students to think critically about a wide range of ideas and issues, and which investigate the diversity of religious thought and practice from multicultural perspectives. In so doing, the department is one of the leading interdisciplinary centers within the university and routinely promotes an appreciation for lifetime learning and the richness of culture and intellectual history.

## **Section II--Program Productivity**

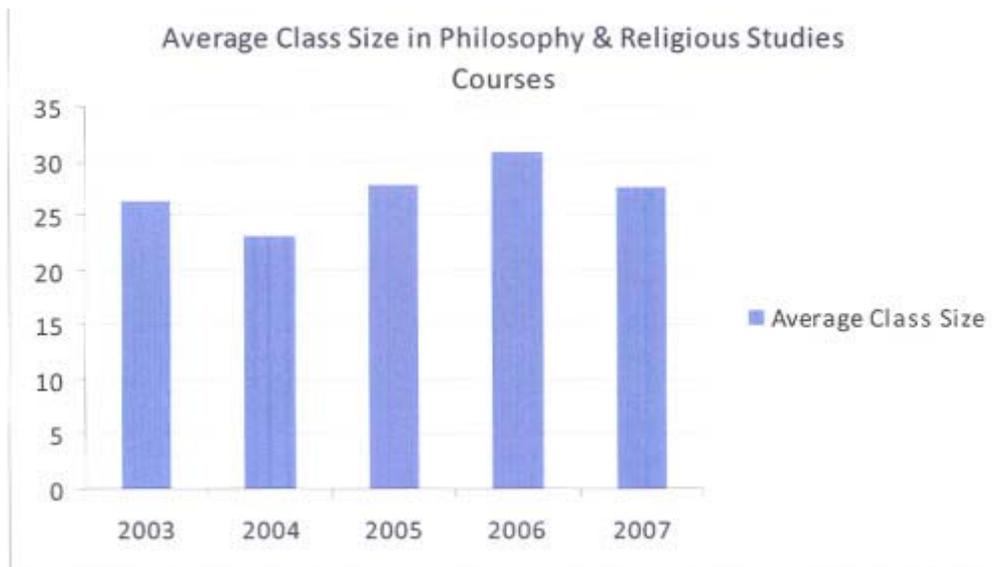
### **IIA. Enrollment of Upper Division Majors in the Program**

Evaluate number and percent of majors and average class sizes. Analyze the number of enrolled upper division majors in the program and enrollment trends of these majors for the past five years.

has grown significantly during the past five years. There was an average of 47.5 majors in the department during this five year period compared to an average of 22 per semester during the previous two year period (which is the last data in the Banner System for the department). This represents an increase during the five year period of 103.5 %. The current average is reflected in the chart below.

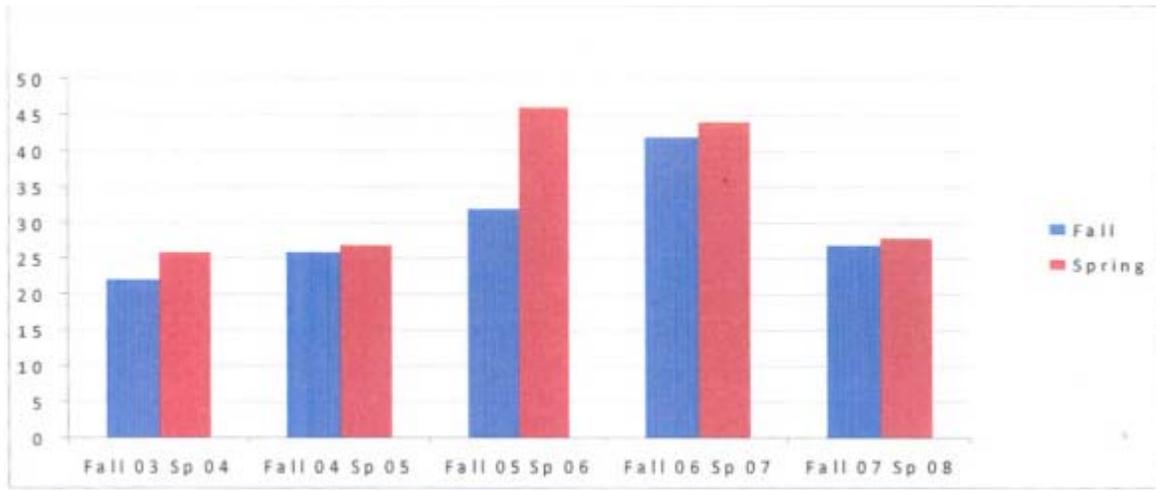


The average class size for the department increased during the five year period of study from an average of 21.7 during the previous two year period to a five year average of 27.3 which is an increase of 25.8 %. The current average class size is reflected in the chart below.



The average number of majors enrolled in upper division courses during this time was 29.8.

This is an increase of approximately 133 % over the previous two year period.

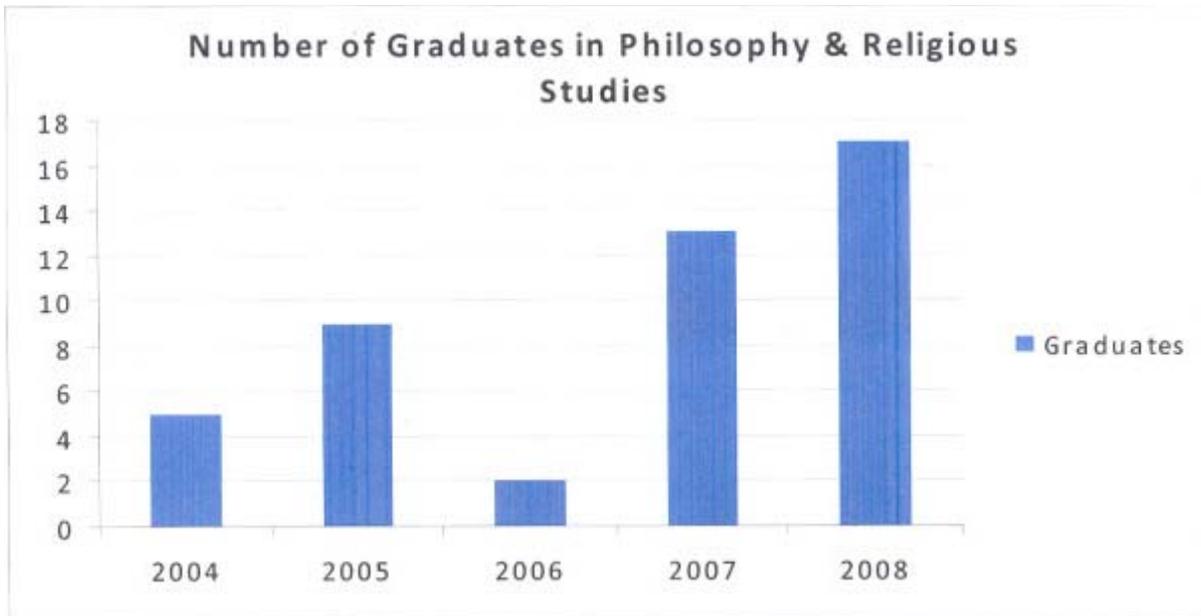


Both the number of majors and average class sizes in PHRS has grown significantly during the last five years. The number of majors reached a peak in the Spring of 2006, and were offset by large graduating classes during the next two years.

## II. B Annual Bachelor's Degree Productivity of the Program

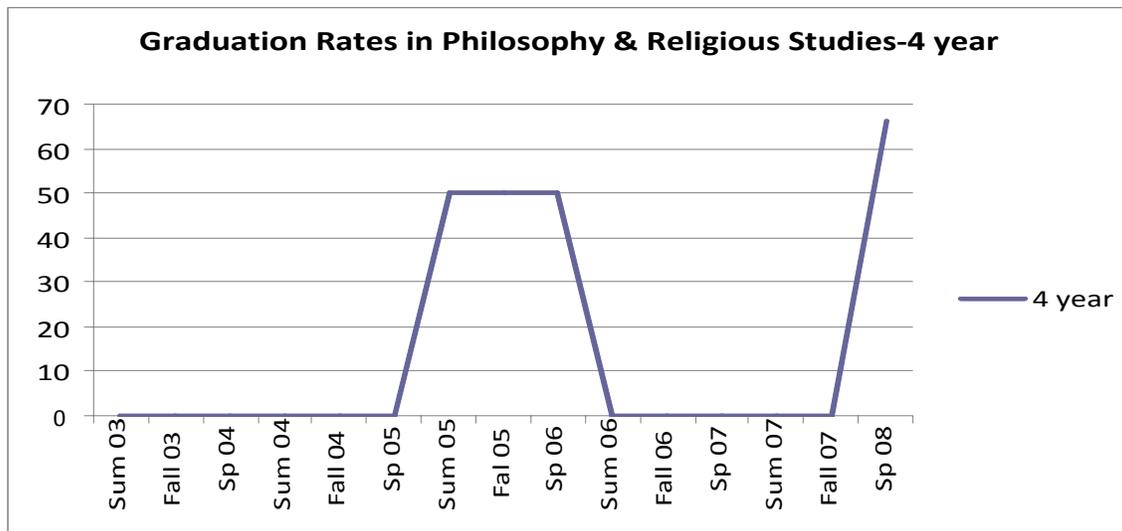
Evaluate number and percent of graduates. Analyze the number of degrees granted annually (fiscal year) by the program and trends of the program's degrees granted over the past five years.

The program graduated 46 majors in the last five year period which is an increase of 102 % over the previous five year period. Though the program has had low graduation numbers in the past, during the last two years Philosophy & Religious Studies has graduated 30 students (13 in 07 and 17 in 08). The trend, as the chart clearly shows, is moving in a pronounced way toward more graduates per year with the exception of the year 2006. These numbers are reflected in the chart below. The chart seems to imply the growing productivity and viability of the department. From 2004 to 2008, the department shows steady gains overall.

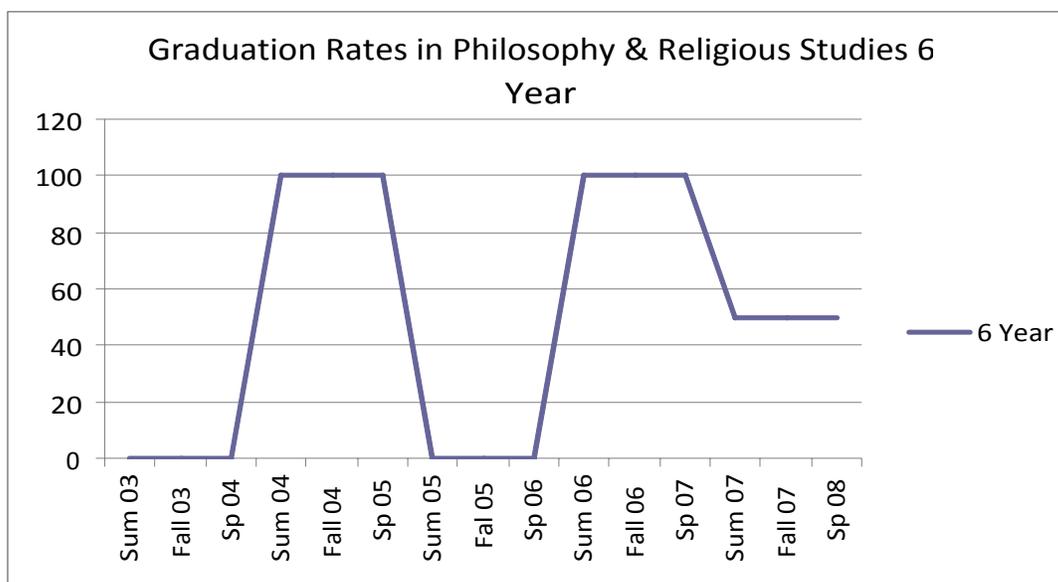


### II C. Program Completion Efficiency and Graduation Rates

Compare the program's graduation rates for the past five years.



The graduation rate at the beginning of this five year period was weak as shown by the four year rate in the chart. However, the six year rate was strong in the second year of this period as it reflects a rate of 100%. The weakest part of the period was the third year when the six year rate dipped to 0%. But then the six year rate rose to 100% in the fourth year and remained at 50% in the fifth year. This strong performance helped to create a trend of emerging strength and efficiency in graduation rates.



#### II D. Efficiency and Clarity of the Programs

List the courses required in the curriculum and examine published course requirements in terms of the simplicity and efficiency of curricular design. Comment on the ease with which majors understand and successfully navigate through the required curriculum for program completion.

The courses which are required in the curriculum are: Fundamentals of Philosophy (PHIL 2010), Principles of Logic and Argumentation (PHIL 2020), World Religions (REL 2020), Senior Capstone (PHIL 4920/REL 4920). In addition to these basic courses, students choose from a series of sub groups or disciplines within the larger Philosophy or Religious Studies track. Each of the required courses are offered on a regular basis. All, except the Senior Capstone course, are offered in several sections each of the Fall and Spring semesters. The Senior Capstone course is offered each Spring semester. Students have no problem finding a seat in the basic

required courses. Both tracks—Philosophy and Religious Studies—have been revised in recent years (2006 & 2007) and reorganized for purposes of clarity. Likewise, the Religious Studies minor has been recently revised to bring it in line with the Philosophy minor. There was some confusion in early years of this period prior to the reorganization with courses in the curriculum which no longer existed in the departmental offerings. In addition, course substitutions were often required for one of the history of philosophy courses in the early part of this five year period. The revision of the tracks has strengthened the clarity and efficiency of the program. The department, however, continues to look for ways to help students navigate the program with greater efficiency.

## **II E. Frequency and Sequencing of Course Offerings Required for Program Completion**

Discuss course sequencing or frequency of course offerings, scheduling, and enrollment history of program required courses.

All of the basic required courses—with the exception of the Senior Capstone (PHIL 4920/REL 4920)-- are offered in multiple sections each semester at various times throughout the day. The Capstone course is offered only once a year in the spring semester. Over the past five years, the enrollment in the basic required courses in Philosophy and Religious Studies has been strong. The five year average for the basic courses without the Senior Capstone is: 39.50 for PHIL 2010; 34.80 for PHIL 2020; and 38.02 for REL 2020. The five year average for the Senior Capstone (PHIL 4920/REL 4920) is 19.2. The graph below charts this five year enrollment pattern. The three required courses which are offered every semester also fill university requirements in the core and therefore reflect a strong pattern of enrollment. The enrollment in the Senior Capstone reflects the growth and development of the department in recent years.

## **II F. Enrollment in the Program's Required Courses**

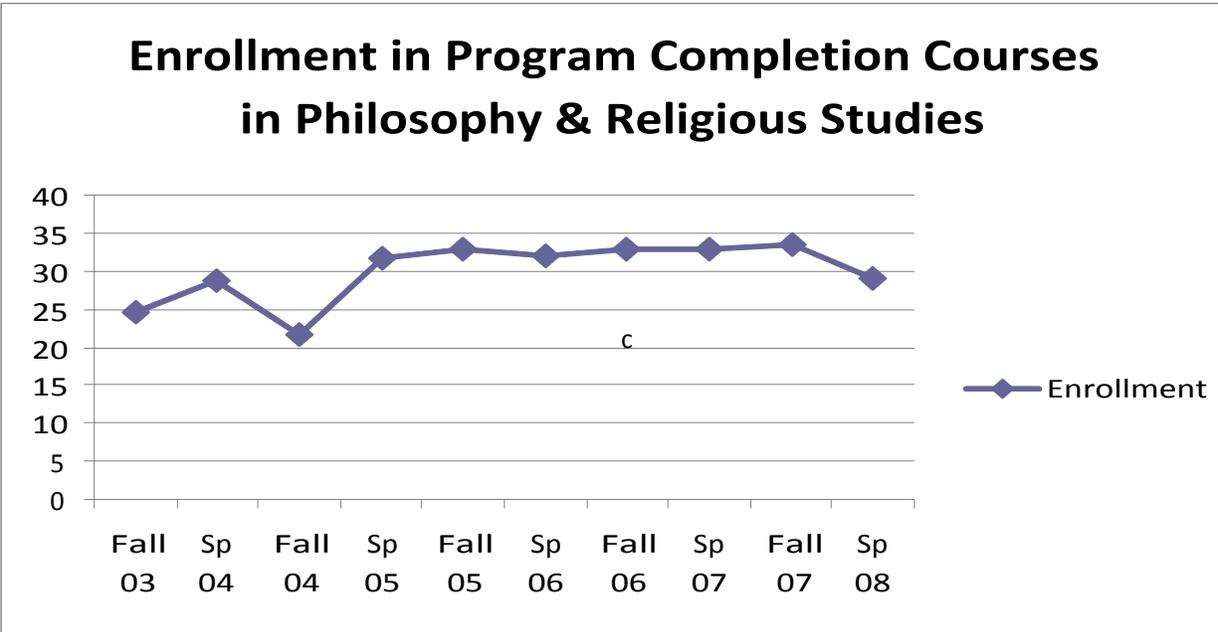
Analyze service course enrollments, and enrollment patterns in the courses required for program completion. Discuss enrollment variation between core and elective courses including differences among courses required for optional tracks or concentrations. List the courses majors must complete that are dropped from the schedule of classes due to low enrollment.

The Philosophy and Religious Studies program supports the programs in African American Studies, General Studies, the Honors Program, and Women and Gender Studies. In all but two

semesters during the last five years, Philosophy and Religious Studies supported the African American Studies program and Women and Gender Studies in a cross listed course AFAM/WGST 2020–Race, Class, and Gender. The average enrollment in that class over this five year span is 47.18. The department has also supported the Core B requirement in Perspectives with a variety of different Perspectives courses. The enrollment over five years in these Perspectives courses has been 36.62. On one occasion during this period a member of the department taught a General Studies course with 40 students. The average enrollment in Women and Gender Studies (other than the AFAM/WGST 2020 course) taught by our department is 25. Finally, the department has supported the work of the Honors Program with an average enrollment of 14.57. The highest number of these enrollments in service courses is that of the Race, Class, and Gender Class. It is a popular and timely course which fulfills a requirement in Area E. The enrollments in the various Perspectives courses are also high. These courses are typically full and have waiting lists. These courses fulfill an Area B requirement. The lowest of the service enrollments is that of the Honors Program courses. The program itself is small as are the classrooms in the Honors House.

Generally, the enrollment pattern in the courses for program completion has been strong. The five year average in these courses is 29.96. The strongest period during this time was from the F 04 to F 07 when there was an increase from an average 21.55 to an average of 33.44. The enrollments in the core courses are generally higher because three of the program core courses also fulfill requirements in the VSU core. Typically the department does not have to drop any of the program completion courses due to low enrollment. The courses which have been dropped in recent years have been courses listed at odd hours in the schedule such as 8:00 pm in the evening.

There have been, however, a few times when special topic courses listed under the rubric REL 4700 had low enrollment numbers.



**II G. Diversity of the Program’s Upper Division Majors and Graduates**

Discuss gender, ethnicity, nationality, and age of the upper division majors and graduates.

During the past five years in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies the number of female majors has ranged from 13.89 % to 37.5 % with a five year average of 26.87 %. During that same period the number of male majors has ranged from 62.5 % to 86.11 % with a five year average of 73.12 %. That is, during this period males in the program have outnumbered females on average about 3 to 1.

In terms of ethnicity, whites have numbered on average between 60.00 % of the population of the major to a high of 82.86 % with a five year average of 70.15 %. Blacks have ranged between 7.32 % of the population of majors to a high of 23.55 % with a five year average of 18.20 %. Asians, Hispanics, and multiracial persons comprise a relatively small part of the departmental population of majors. The average age of these majors over the past five years has been 24.40 years.

All students and graduates have been U.S. citizens. The average age of the graduates from the department in the last five years has been 26.17 years. In terms of gender, 30.5 % of the graduates have been female and 69.5 % have been male. With regard to ethnicity, 23.9% of the graduates from the program in Philosophy and Religious Studies in the last five years have been black, 71.73 % have been white, 2.17 % have been multiracial and 2.17 % have been Asian.

## **II H. Instructional Productivity of FTE Faculty in the Program's Home Department**

Compare faculty productivity and credit-hour generation per full-time-equivalent faculty member in the program's home department. Discuss whether the program productivity affects instructional productivity of the FTE faculty in the department positively or adversely.

In recent years the department has experienced phenomenal growth in both the generation of student credit hours and the increase of majors.

In 2002 the number of departmental student credit hours generated was 2928. In 2003 the productivity of the department increased to 3,780. By 2004 student credit hours in the department had climbed to 4656. By the Spring of 2006 that number had continued to climb to 6387. This represents an increase of 118% in a 4 year period in the department compared to an overall growth of approximately 20% in the College of Arts & Sciences during the same period.

The department continues to rank high on the Delaware Study and on the National Study of Instructional Costs and Productivity. The most recent reports show the department scoring at the 75th Percentile for the production of student credit hours per FTE faculty (Delaware 2005-2006) as well as high scores for cost/productivity on the 2006 National Study of Instructional Costs and Productivity.

One must assume that this program productivity of an increase in student credit hours of 118% positively affected the instructional productivity of the FTE faculty. During that same time period the number of majors in the department grew at an even greater rate than did the production of student credit hours--approximately 177 %.

## **II I. This Program's Contribution to Achieving VSU's Mission**

List the substantive contributions this program makes to the achievement of VSU's published statement of institutional mission.

The Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies extends the University mission of service to its region by offering two programs of study--the philosophy track and religious studies track--which challenge students to think critically about a wide range of ideas and issues, and which investigate the diversity of religious thought and practice from multicultural perspectives. In so doing the department is one of the leading interdisciplinary centers within the university and routinely promotes an appreciation for lifetime learning and the richness of culture and intellectual history. Both of these programs--Philosophy & Religious Studies--serve as basic preparation for a number of graduate and professional programs for students in the region. The department takes the university commitment to public service seriously through its student-centered approach to teaching and learning, and through its personalized approach to academic advising. The departmental program in philosophy and religious studies further contributes to the university mission through participation in strong preparatory or introductory courses in the humanities which contribute to the university core and help to become the foundation for

humanistic learning in other disciplines. The courses in Fundamentals of Philosophy, Principles of Logic and Argumentation, and World Religions make important connections with other disciplines and provide skills necessary for proper educational growth in other majors.

## **II J. Summary Conclusion of the Program's Overall Productivity**

Building upon your responses from sections II A– II I, establish a summary conclusion of the program's overall productivity. Include any additional detailed data analyses, interpretations, rationales, and evidence necessary to support the summary conclusion of the program.

The department has grown significantly during the past years. There was an average of 47.5 majors in the department during this five year period compared to an average of 22 per semester during the previous two year period. This represents an increase of 103.5 % in the growth of majors.

The average class size for the department increased during the last five years from an average of 21.7 (the previous two year period) to a five year average of 27.3 which is an increase of 25.8 %.

The program graduated 46 majors in the last five year period which is an increase of 102 % over the previous five year period. Though the program has had low graduation numbers in the past, during the last two years the department has graduated 30 students (13 in 07 and 17 in 08).

Enrollment in the courses of the department remains strong. The five year average enrollment for basic required courses (without the capstone) is 39.50. Likewise, the five year average enrollment in courses for program completion has also been strong (29.6).

In recent years the department has experienced phenomenal growth in both the generation of student credit hours and the increase of majors. In 2002 the number of student credit hours generated was 2928. By the Spring of 2006 that number had continued to climb to 6387 which represents an increase of 118 % compared to an overall growth of approximately 20 % in the College of Arts and Sciences. At that point the department scored at the 75<sup>th</sup> Percentile for the production of student credit hours per FTE faculty (on the Delaware Study). The department also had high scores for cost/productivity on the National Study of Instructional Costs and Productivity. During this period, the number of departmental majors grew at a rate of approximately 177 % over the numbers from 2001 and 2002.

Based on this overall summary of leading indicators of productivity, the department would have to be rated as emerging as a very strong and productive department.

## **Section III–Program Quality**

### **III A. Quality of the Program as Defined by Program Guidelines and/or Accreditation Standards in the Discipline**

Discuss how the program meets or exceeds curricular guidelines and/or accreditation standards for quality programs in this academic field of study. Discuss coherence and relevance to program learning outcomes, effectiveness in relation to the findings of learning outcomes, relevance to student needs, and curricular or program changes made in response to assessment results. Support conclusions with evidence or examples.

In the early years, the program was a single discipline of philosophy only. In those years the program was service-oriented in that large numbers of courses were taught outside of the department and the priority tended to be the promotion of the outside disciplines. After the last program review in 2002, the department moved away from its reliance on the service model and began to focus more intentionally on building a program of study within its own right. In addition, the department re-organized with a two track program of philosophy and religious studies which is consistent with some of the strong programs in the cohort of our benchmark institutions. Furthermore, in 2006 based on a curriculum assessment of the department, the curriculum was revised to bring it into line with the best programs among our benchmark schools. The adding of a new faculty line in 2008 will allow the department to develop new courses in Native American and indigenous religion. These courses will add a new dimension to the work of the department.

The department works effectively in relating to and promoting major educational outcomes such as encouraging an understanding of central issues, topics and philosophers in the history of philosophy, and in encouraging an understanding of the world's religious traditions and their influence. Likewise, the outcome for critical thinking and analytical skills in both philosophy and religious studies is demonstrated in the list of student achievements (see III J). Perhaps the most notable achievement in recent years for one of our students was the work of Chris Parker who won the "Outstanding Student Award in Arts & Sciences" in 2008. In any case, the long list of recent student achievement makes the case for coherence and relevance to learning outcomes.

### **III B. Quality of the Faculty**

Address number of faculty (full and part-time) and ability to meet or exceed program expectations with faculty available. Discuss specializations and professional development of faculty.

The department has a diverse and energetic faculty that exceeds program expectations. There are seven full time faculty (6 tenure track & 1 lecturer), and at present, four part-time faculty. All of the full time faculty regularly attend national and international conferences where they present papers. Our faculty are also busy publishing papers. In the last three years, the department has published two books. Student evaluations of the departmental faculty are typically high—usually between 4.0 & 5.0. This faculty has an international and global perspective. In the Spring 2009, there are three Study Abroad programs connected to the department: Spain, Japan, and Italy, Greece, and Turkey. In addition, our faculty have participated in programs in China and Israel. Even though this is a small department which

makes the faculty generalists by nature of the program, there is also a wide range of interests and proficiencies. Our faculty in philosophy work in the areas of history of philosophy, ethics, ethics and science, healthcare and ethics, logic and critical thinking, environmental ethics, and Native American studies. In religious studies, the faculty likewise have a wide range of specialties including religion and culture, world religions, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Confucianism, archaeology of Israel, Ethics and Sexuality, Christian Ethics, mysticism, religious pluralism, and indigenous religions.

### **III C. Quality of VSU Facilities, Equipment, Learning Support Resources, and Practicum Placements Supporting the Program**

Discuss the current space allotted to the program in terms of adequacy and condition, available technology, labs, equipment, and other indicators of adequacy to support the program. Address these same aspects for projected growth over the next five years.

Religious Studies has overgrown its current space in Ashley Hall. We have a full time faculty member who is currently housed in another building on campus, and we have a lecturer whose office is the department conference room. We also have four part time faculty members who do not have any office space in our department or anywhere on campus. We also have a variety of books that have been donated to our department by retired, deceased, or emeritus faculty, and we need at least one room to store this growing departmental library.

In terms of classroom space, the Department traditionally fills West Hall 104 and West Hall 147 throughout each weekday. With the increasing number of full time and part time faculty currently teaching for our department we needed to add sections into other classrooms such as West Hall 150 and West Hall 305. Keeping the classrooms updated as smart classrooms is a top priority of the department.

In the future of the department, we would benefit from a computer lab because of increased use of WebCT Vista and online class technology. All of our lower level classes would benefit from a classroom lab in which students would be able to take examinations during class time (scheduling lab time for classes to take examinations together is usually difficult since most other departments' classroom labs are booked throughout the semester.) The logic classes would also be enhanced by classroom lab time utilizing software packages that are designed to teach particular concepts in critical reasoning and probability. Currently, our classes are enjoying using WebCT Vista, and being able to have class time working together on particular tasks would allow us to do more with those classes.

The projected growth of the department in the next five years will necessitate additional office space, additional departmental meeting and library space, additional classroom space, computer labs, and updates to the computer systems currently in the department offices and classrooms.

### **III. D. Quality of Research, Scholarship and Creative Endeavors**

Evaluate faculty and student involvement, productivity, reputation, level of financial support,

mentoring and development opportunities for new faculty.

Our faculty has been very active in the past five years. Together, the departmental faculty have presented 45 papers at national and international conferences, written 26 articles for refereed journals, published 2 books, edited 1 journal issue, and served in a supervisory role on 4 archaeological excavations in Israel. Our students are also active in the presentation of papers for the Council on Undergraduate Research at VSU. Christopher Parker won the “Outstanding Student” Award in Arts and Sciences in 2008. He also won the “Best Poster” Award at CUR 2008 and the “Best Paper” Award for CUR 2007. Stacey Wright won the “Best Paper” Award for CUR 2007. (For a full listing of student scholarship, see under III. J.)

The department is known for the quality of its faculty, creativity in the classroom, professional development, and interdisciplinary skill. In 2005, one of our junior faculty members became a Fellow, Wabash Center for Teaching & Learning in Theology & Religion–Workshop for Pre-Tenure Religion Faculty (2005-2006), as well as an Affiliate, Pluralism Project, Harvard University. In 2007, one departmental faculty member won the VSU Award for Excellence in Professional Development. In 2008, Christine James won the Arts and Sciences Award for Excellence in Service. In 2009, Fred Downing was nominated by Mercer University Press for a GAYA Award in the category of “Creative Nonfiction/Biography” for his book titled Elie Wiesel: A Religious Biography.

The department is also known to have some of the most gifted and creative classroom teachers in the university. Many of the departmental faculty use PowerPoint presentations, DVD, and online video presentations. Departmental faculty regularly use small group exercises as part of larger class room strategies and other creative strategies which seek out student involvement. The faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies are in demand by their colleagues across the university for guest speaking. Several departmental faculty have demonstrated special skill as mentors to students as the department’s success in the Council of Undergraduate Research demonstrates.

To this point in time, the level of financial support has been adequate for departmental needs. The departmental faculty have been gratified by the support in acquiring an additional line in the Fall 08. Yet the department, like all departments in the university system, is threatened by the down turn in the economy and the looming budget cuts that will inevitably erode support from the system.

### **III. E. Quality of the University’s Annual Financial Investment in the Program’s Operation and Growth**

Discuss funding available to the program in all areas: personnel, supplies, travel, equipment, etc. Comment on the annual financial investment available to support the program’s operation, growth, and success.

Salaries for the personnel in the department can be grouped into two areas: senior faculty and junior faculty. A brief unofficial survey of these two groups would yield differing results. The

senior faculty have benefitted greatly from the recent faculty study and the initiative to adjust salaries for them. The junior faculty did not receive raises in the recent initiative and therefore may not be as competitive in a comparison with similar faculty at benchmark institutions. Funding for travel has recently been increased both for the department and for faculty development grants. Travel costs to national conferences, however, has increased dramatically in recent years leaving faculty with uncovered expenses. The departmental budget, like that of others, is a “bare bones” operation. There is little room for the repair of office equipment or for operational costs beyond the bare essentials. In a time of budget crisis, the first item to go is that of travel which hurts faculty. There are no additional funds to buy new equipment. For example, our copy machine is ten years old and will need to be replaced soon, but there is no funding source. Funds which might promote growth are nonexistent.

### **III. F. Quality of Program Advising, Enrollment Management and Student Services for this Program**

Evaluate program advising, enrollment management for the program, and any student services specifically designed to support the program’s majors (i.e. tutoring, internships, practica, etc.). Provide evidence documenting the effectiveness of these activities.

Advising is a strength of the department. The departmental faculty share the responsibility for advising students. The department head has an open door policy for meeting with students either for advising or for other student concerns. Several faculty in the department have strong mentoring skills and naturally draw students for advising and counseling. Enrollment management has been an important issue for the department. After the last program review, the faculty took responsibility for adding majors to the department, and thereby entered into a period of unprecedented growth. However, the department did not establish ongoing policies or procedures for sustaining growth.

The major student service designed to support the program’s majors is a departmental club. The Philosophy and Religious Studies Club sponsors regular meetings twice a month and organizes cultural and academic activities one a month. Dr. Serrán-Pagán is the faculty advisor. Since the creation of the Club faculty and students have reported that the Philosophy and Religious Studies Department has gained visibility on campus. The mission of the club is to promote a diverse program of cultural and intellectual activities on campus (interdisciplinary-pluralistic approach) that are in line with our departmental objectives. The club serves both educational and recruitment purposes-- to educate people about important issues and also recruit students who may be interested in the academic study of philosophy and religious studies at VSU.

During the 2007-2008, the club addressed a variety of topics and invited speakers to present their research at club meetings. Latif Bolat, a Turkish musician, was invited to perform Sufi music and poetry at VSU and at Hildegard’s. He also gave talks to students taking classes in the Political Science Department, the Honors Program, the Business Department, and the Philosophy and Religious Studies Department. The club also sponsored two panel discussions: Eastern and Western perspectives on the environment (Dr. Christine James, Dr. Carl Hand and Dr. Cristóbal Serrán-Pagán); and health care in America and abroad (Cater Davis, DeMarcus Marshall,

Richard MacLaughlin, and Hutch Zimmerman). Also, the club sponsored a trip to Atlanta for students to have the opportunity to hear Tibetan Buddhist teachings of His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama. The club sponsored a showing of the movie “Crash” and had a discussion afterwards. These events were typically well attended by students, faculty and staff members, and people from the Valdosta community.

In the Fall 2008, Dr. Michael Stoltzfus gave a talk on “Sexuality and Ethics.” On this occasion the UC theater was packed by mostly students. The club also sponsored an interfaith panel composed of Fr. Stan White, Rev. Floyd Rose, Dr. Stephen Childs, and Dr. Linda Elder. The group addressed “The Cultural Divide in America.” Esha Bandyopadhaya, a noted Indian performer, gave a lecture on “the Philosophy of Indian Music” and also performed at VSU and at Hildegard’s. Dr. Ted Peters, from the Graduate Theological Union of Berkeley, came to Valdosta and lectured on “Nanotechnology, Genetics and Trans-humanism” at Christ Episcopal Church, an event that the club also promoted. Dr. Serrán-Pagán spoke about “Jews, Muslims and Christians of Spain Throughout the Ages,” as part of the Hispanic Heritage Month 2008; and the last event of the semester was showing of the film “Gandhi” with a discussion afterwards. The club drew more than 100 people at some of these Fall scheduled events.

### **III. G. Quality of Diversity and Global Perspective in the Curriculum, Faculty, and Students of the Program**

Assess diversity with regard to the program’s faculty and students. Comment also on the program’s commitment to study abroad and faculty exchanges with universities of other nations.

The commitment to both diversity and a global perspective is strong in the program of Philosophy and Religious Studies at VSU. The program has 7 faculty members: 4 males and 3 females. One of the males is Hispanic, and one of the females is Native American (Cherokee). The department actively supports the program in African American Studies with the sharing of faculty for the teaching of AFAM 2020–Race, Class, and Gender. In addition, the department has cross-listed courses with the program in Women’s and Gender Studies. The program has a five year average of 18.20 % African American students. Asians, Hispanics, and multi-racial persons comprise a smaller percentage. In terms of gender, the program faculty is comprised of 57 % males and 43 % female. A five average of the program’s enrolled students is 73 % male and 27 % female. The department’s last two hires have strengthened the diversity and global perspective of the department and the university. Dr. Lavonna Lovern is Native American and teaches both philosophy and religious studies courses. Her work extends the focus and perspective of the department to include Native American thought and the study of indigenous religion around the world. Dr. Cristobal Serrán-Pagán is a native from Spain. He was born in Ceuta, a city located in North of Africa, on the border with Morocco. Dr. Serrán-Pagán expands the horizons of the departmental program by teaching from an international worldview.

The inter-disciplinary and multi-cultural aspect of the program courses is particularly evident in a class focusing on world religions. Students are introduced to social and religious customs, aesthetic expression, literature, intellectual and political history, international perspectives, and a

critical analysis of a student's own culture. Each of the religious traditions studied in the course are presented in their unique historical and cultural contexts.

Religion is interpreted as a dynamic influence on cultural development and social transformation throughout history and across the globe. Each religious tradition is analyzed in terms of their diverse ethical teachings concerning individual and social responsibility. The influence of religious ethics in business, law, marriage and family, media, gender roles, and criminal justice is an integral aspect of the course structure. In addition, each religion is presented in terms of attitudes and ethical teachings concerning other religious traditions.

The program's commitment to Study Abroad is exemplified by the courses offered by the department for the Summer 09. Dr. Serran Pagan will teach World Religions and Spanish Mysticism as a part of the European Council's summer program in Spain. Dr. Michael Stoltzfus will teach Japanese Religion and Culture with a focus on Buddhism in Osaka, Japan as a part of the work of the VSU Center for International Programs. Dr. Ari Santas and Dr. Fred Downing will teach courses on the Ethics of the Ancient Mediterranean, and Early Christianity in the context of ancient sites in Italy, Greece, and Turkey. In addition, other faculty members have traveled widely to include programs and work in India, China, Europe, Egypt, Israel, the West Bank of Palestine, and Jordan.

In addition, the program is very open to the possibility of faculty exchanges from universities from other nations. Effective November 1, 2008 (through June 30, 2009) the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies will host a Brown Visiting Scholar, Professor Abdulmir Al Aasam from Iraq (and Damascus, Syria). Professor Al Aasam is a scholar of Islam who will contribute to the work of the Philosophy and Religious Studies program and to that of other departments. Likewise, the department is open to other visiting scholars especially scholars of the world religions or philosophers who might contribute to the work of our ongoing program.

### **III. H. Quality of Endowments, Scholarships, Gifts, Grants and Sponsors for the Program**

Discuss funding from external sources and address how such funding contributes to the program, students, and faculty.

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Funding from external sources for the program in Philosophy and Religious Studies is limited. Several departmental faculty contribute monthly to the program foundation account which can be used for funding incidental items throughout the year such as a luncheon for students in the senior seminar. A few students have won scholarships in recent years. Daniel Mares recently won a scholarship from the Georgia Wine and Spirits Wholesalers. In 2007, Christopher Parker had a STARS assistantship/scholarship for study abroad. But the main sponsors for the program at this point are the individual faculty members of the department who give money to the program.

### **III. I. Quality: Program Honors and Awards**

Identify any awards or honors received by the program within the last five years. If the program has not attained a possible accreditation, explain why.

There is no separate accreditation possible for a program in philosophy or religious studies. The program in Philosophy and Religious Studies lead the College of Arts and Sciences in the production of student credit hours per FTE faculty in the last Delaware Study.

### **III J. Quality: Exceptional Achievements and Honors of the Program's Students, Graduates, and Faculty**

Discuss any awards or honor received by students, graduates or faculty members within the last five years.

Both students and faculty within the department of Philosophy and Religious Studies have received a number of awards and honors in recent years. Some of the more prominent awards and honors within the last five years include:

Christopher Parker–Outstanding Student in Arts and Sciences, 2008; Best Poster Award, CUR, 2008; Best Paper Award, CUR, 2007

Rich Amesbury–Fellow, Wabash Center for Teaching & Learning in Theology and Religion (2005-2006); VSU Award for Excellence in Professional Development (2007)  
Christine James–State Young Careerist Award, given by the Business and Professional Women of Georgia (2005); College of Arts and Sciences Excellence Award in Service (2008)

Frederick L. Downing–nominated by Mercer University Press for a GAYA Award (Georgia Author of the Year) in Creative Nonfiction/Biography for his book titled Elie Wiesel: A Religious Biography

#### **Full List of Awards and Honors**

#### **Awards and Honors–Students:**

- Christopher Parker, Outstanding Student in Arts and Sciences, 2008
- Christopher Parker, Best Poster Award, Council on Undergraduate Research, 2008, “Explaining Morality Away: Some Problems with the New Ethical Naturalism”
- Christopher Parker, Best Paper Award, Council on Undergraduate Research 2007, “The Ethics of International Business: A Hobbesian Analysis and Model”
- Christopher Parker, Published poetry in Odradek 2007
- Christopher Parker, Published in Snake Nation Press 2006
  
- John Taylor, published in Odradek, 2008
  
- Andy McClure, presented paper “Islam and European Culture,” January 18, 2007 at the conference Heresy, Blasphemy, and Freedom of Expression: An International, Multi-Disciplinary Conference on Information Fluency, Critical Thinking, and Ethics Presented

by the University of Central Florida Department of Philosophy, The UCF Office of Student Conduct and Student Rights and Responsibilities and The Quality Enhancement Plan for Information Fluency University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

- Stacey Wright, Best Paper Award, Council on Undergraduate Research 2006: “How Far Does the Apple Fall from the Tree? Exploring Parallels Between Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*”
- Tom Smith, “On *Punch Drunk Love*,” published in *Blastitude* #17, July 2004

#### **Scholarships:**

- Christopher Parker, STARS assistantship/scholarships for study abroad 2007, 2008
- Daniel Mares, Georgia Wine and Spirits Wholesalers Scholarship 2008
- Six of our undergraduates who have gone on to graduate school since 2004 have been awarded full Teaching Assistantship financial support. Please see section III K. for the listing of names and graduate programs.

#### **Faculty Honors and Awards:**

- Richard Amesbury, Fellow, Wabash Center for Teaching & Learning in Theology and Religions, (2005-2006); University and College of Arts and Sciences Excellence Award in Professional Development, (2007);
- Christine James, College of Arts and Sciences Excellence Award in Service, 2008; Georgia Business and Professional Women Young Careerist Award (2005); Valdosta Business and Professional Women Young Careerist Award, 2005
- Frederick L. Downing—nominated by Mercer University Press for a GAYA (Georgia Author of the Year) in Creative Non-fiction/Biography for his book titled Elie Wiesel: A Biography

### **III K. Quality: General Success of the Program’s Graduates**

Discuss the success of program graduates. Include licensure or certification rates, job placement statistics, average salaries, test scores, and admissions to post-baccalaureate programs.

There are no licensure or certification programs for the degree in philosophy or religious studies. However, many of our graduates do go on to enter advanced programs of study in graduate or professional schools. Many of them have gained full scholarship status in their programs of advance study. Some of our recent graduates who have gone on to do advanced study include:

- Kathleen Kirk, MM Program in Vocal Performance, Northern Arizona University, 2008 (with full assistantship support)

- Stephen Everett, PhD Program in Philosophy, University of South Carolina, 2005 (with full assistantship support)
- Brad Matthews, International MBA Program, Moore School of Business, University of South Carolina, 2005 (with full assistantship support)
- Jackie Caldwell, Masters in Sociology, Valdosta State University, 2005
- T. Harvey Greene III, Physician Assistant Program, Barry University, 2005
- James Hitchcock, MA Program, Georgia State University, 2005 (with full assistantship support)
- Brad Lenz, PhD Program in Humanities, Florida State University, 2004 (with full assistantship support)
- Jason Lewis, PhD Program in Religious Studies, Syracuse University, 2004 (with full assistantship support)
- Demarcus Marshall, MPA Program, Valdosta State University, 2004 (MPA, 2005)
- Nic Pumphrey, Ph.D. Program in Religious Studies, Vanderbilt University, 2008

**Other Graduates Currently in Graduate or Professional Schools  
or Recently Graduated**

- Anna Mitchell Hall graduated with a BA in Philosophy in 1996 and is now in the MDiv program at Candler School of Theology at Emory University
- Pam France earned her BA in Philosophy in 1995 before attending Asbury Seminary. She is now serving as an Ordained Methodist Minister
- Mark Taormino graduated with a BA in Philosophy in 1996. He is currently working towards his Doctorate of Philosophy at the University of Georgia
- Lance Neff received his BA in Philosophy in 2000, and received a Master of Theological Studies from Weston Jesuit School of Theology. He currently attends Florida Coastal School of Law
- Jason Johns earned his BA in Philosophy in 1999 and is in his final year of law School at Texas Tech University.

- Alan Bernstein graduated with a BA in Philosophy in 1981. He is now the Circulation Manager at VSU's Odum Library, and is currently in the Ed.D. program at Valdosta State University
- Jeremy Jones graduated with a BA in Philosophy in 1997. Jeremy attended Asbury Seminary and is now an Ordained Methodist Minister

### **III L. Quality: Stakeholder Satisfaction with the Program**

Present data regarding satisfaction from students, alumni, employers, community partners, etc. concerning their satisfaction with the quality of the program. Include any program improvements initiated as a result of feedback.

Current students and alumni typically rate the program very high. On the SOI given at the end of the semester, the department faculty are usually ranked with high scores. All of the departmental faculty are typically scored by current students in the 4.0 to 5.0 range. Approximately 50 % of the departmental SOIs rank above 4.5. There is anecdotal evidence suggesting that for many current students and alumni their best educational experiences at VSU are to be found in the program of Philosophy and Religious Studies.

For that reason and others it is not surprising to find that the responses by program majors to the questions posed by the Senior Exit Survey tend to run high. When asked to rate the overall quality of the faculty in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, a five year average of 83.2 % of the graduating seniors in the program stated that the quality of the faculty was either excellent or good. Likewise, during that same five year period 90.4 % of the program seniors rate the quality of the instruction in the department as either excellent or good. The opportunities for interaction with faculty were rated at 90.2 % either excellent or good. The highest grades in the program were given by the seniors to the “organization of the curriculum” at 97.6 % (either excellent or good), the “attitude of the faculty to students” at 96.8 % (either excellent or good), and the fairness with which faculty graded students at 95.4 % (either excellent or good). When rating the program courses as preparation for other endeavors, the seniors over the past five years gave the following scores: as preparation for liberal education 81.8 % (either excellent or good), as preparation for graduation school 82 % (excellent or good), and as preparation for initial employment 76.75 % (excellent or good).

The overall high quality of the scores on the Senior Exit Survey implies an overall sensitivity to the nature of student life and to the opinions of students by program faculty. One of the recent major changes in the program came in response to student input. The impetus to re-organize the department as a two-track major came as the Religious Studies minor began to grow and students made known their wishes for the possibility of more course work in that area. It was the presence of these students in combination with a faculty analyzing the nature and scope of the present curriculum that gave rise to a new program and a new period of vitality.

### **III M. Quality: Selectivity and Academic Achievement of Students and Graduates in the**

## **Program.**

Evaluate admission standards of the program, including level of selectivity and skills required for entry. Include average SAT scores of majors, as well as GPA of majors, and distribution of GPA for program graduates.

Students who major in Philosophy and Religious Studies at VSU typically come to the program from a variety of standpoints. Some come to the university with the intent to take either the philosophy track or the religious studies track. Often these students have been influenced by a significant person such as a high school teacher, or someone in a religious organization. Others discover an interest in philosophy or religious studies during study at the university. Some students take an elective course and find a second major. For students who take the philosophy track, critical thinking skills are important as are analytical methods to deal with principal problems within philosophy. In religious studies an appreciation of the sense of the sacred or holy is fundamental to understanding the full sweep of the world's religions. Likewise, analytical skills are also important in religious studies to understand the cultural context of religion. For both philosophy and religious studies, the historical method is important. There is a historical component in each track—the history of philosophy, and the history of religions. Both tracks find focus in the examination of “lived experience.” The philosophy track tends to examine the nature of the “good” and the “ethical,” while the religious studies track questions the sense of the “sacred” which leads to living the “religious” life. In common ways, each track leads the student to examine what is the ethical or religious life. The core curriculum in Area F also requires 9 hours of foreign language. A cursory reading of the program in Philosophy and Religious Studies shows an initial complexity and basic sense of sophistication to the major. Each track has a foundations type course which leads the student into the discipline and its various methodologies. Then each track pursues the inquiry through a history of the discipline and traditions of study within the scope of upper division electives. In each track the program encourages the student to investigate and analyze human experience and to learn critical methods for doing so. Finally, in both the philosophy track and in religious studies, the student finishes the curriculum with a senior seminar.

As earlier sections of this review have indicated, students in the program have responded in qualitative ways to the challenge to investigate and explore the disciplines. The five year average GPA of Upper Division Majors is a “B-” (2.96). The five year average SAT score for Majors is 1045. The five year average GPA of program graduates is a solid “B” (3.23). Perhaps the important figure here is that the average GPA for program graduates is significantly higher than for Upper Division Majors. While this discrepancy may seem insignificant at first glance, it may be an indicator of the quality and rigor of the program--that program completion requires more than simply the accumulation of course work. As with other programs of quality within the university, the program in Philosophy and Religious Studies seems to require inherent characteristics such as discipline and focus, and the ability to sustain those characteristic aspects of the good student.

## **III N. Quality of the Program's Responsiveness to Change and Improvement**

Address significant program improvements made within the last five years, particularly those made in response to changing conditions, new external requirements, and/or departmental assessment initiatives.

During the last Comprehensive Program Review (presented in Spring 2002), the department assessed its then current situation as a program which had functioned almost solely as a “service-oriented” department for other areas of the university. Large numbers of courses were taught by departmental faculty outside of the department which led to a lack of concentration on cultivating the department as a major within its own right. At that time, there was a lack of planning and co-ordination within the department and a failure to development curriculum.

Based on the critical assessment that was done during that time, the department began to face future options. The department decided to take responsibility for the autonomous direction of the program and with renewed energy the program faculty entered a new and unprecedented period of growth. In 2003, the faculty implemented a dual track major including tracks for both philosophy and religious studies. During that same period, two young faculty were hired both of whom soon brought a new sense of charisma to the program. The more senior faculty injected a sense of stability and creative leadership. In the Summer of 2006, the Board of Regents approved a new title for the department—now the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies. A new department head was added that same summer after a long period of interims. During this period, the program grew in number of majors, and began to lead the College of Arts and Sciences in student credit hour generation per FTE faculty (as reflected in the Delaware Study, 2005-2006). During this same period, the program in Philosophy and Religious Studies has had faculty members who won the VSU Excellence Award in Professional Development, and the Excellence in Service Award for the College of Arts and Sciences; faculty who published two books, one of whom was nominated for a GAYA Award (Georgia Author of the Year). Also during this period, the program had one of its students win the “Outstanding Student Award” in the College of Arts and Sciences. The last major achievement within the program is the addition of a new line (a lecturer) that extends the department in important and new ways by adding the ability to teach “Native American Studies” and “Indigenous Religions,” and her presence adds to the diversity of the department and the university. The quality of this program’s response to change and improvement in the last five years has been both dramatic and extraordinary.

### **III O. Overall Quality of the Program**

Building upon your responses from sections III A–III N, establish a summary conclusion of the program’s overall quality. Include any additional detailed data analyses, interpretations, rationales, and evidence necessary to support the summary conclusion of the program.

The quality of the program as defined by program guidelines is strong. The program moved away from an earlier “service” model and began to establish its own autonomy by creating a two track model in line with the university benchmark institutions. The department works effectively in relating to and promoting major educational outcomes such as teaching critical thinking and analytical skills demonstrated by the success of majors in CUR and A & S competitions.

The department has a diverse and energetic faculty that exceeds program expectations. All of the departmental faculty have active research agendas and are busy making presentations at conferences and writing articles. During this period two books have come from this program and awards given for professional development. The academic specialization within the program is also diverse and comprehensive for a small department.

The projected growth of the department will necessitate additional office space, classroom space, and updates to the computer system. The faculty is not only energetic but active presenting 45 papers at national and international meetings, and writing 26 articles for journals in the last 5 years. The departmental faculty have also written 2 books, edited journals, and served in supervisory roles on archaeological excavations. The department is known for the quality of its faculty as demonstrated by the VSU Excellence Award in Professional Development (2007), an A&S Award for Excellence in Service (2008), and a nomination for a GAYA Award (2009). In addition, a student won the "Outstanding Student Award in A & S (2008). There have also been a variety of awards for CUR. The department is also known to have some of the most gifted and creative classroom teachers in the university. Salaries for senior faculty are perhaps more competitive than salaries for junior faculty. All departments at the university come under stress during a time of economic down turn.

Advising is a strength for the department. Several faculty in the department have strong mentoring skills. The major student service designed to support the program's majors is a departmental club which has been particularly active in the last two years. The club has worked hard to introduce additional opportunities for intellectual and social awareness for students. The commitment to both diversity and a global perspective is strong in the program of Philosophy and Religious Studies as evidenced by the department's recent decisions in hiring. The composition of the departmental faculty mirrors its commitment to diversity. The program has 3 Study Abroad programs scheduled for Summer 09. And the department is open to faculty exchanges as evidenced by its history with the Brown Visiting Scholar program.

The strength of the quality of the program in Philosophy and Religious Studies is evidenced by the awards that both faculty and students have garnered in recent years. Both faculty and students have a list of recent honors. For the faculty these include: the VSU Award for Excellence in Professional Development, State Young Careerist Award, A & S Excellence Award in Service, and a nomination for a GAYA Award. For students, the list includes: Outstanding Student in A & S, and a series of CUR awards. The general success of the program's graduates is evidenced by the number of students who have gone on to graduate school with an assistantship. Some of the schools where students have gone include: Barry University, Florida State University, Georgia State University, Northern Arizona University, Syracuse University, and Vanderbilt University.

Students have ranked the program faculty and the program very high in their SOIs and on the Senior Exit Survey. Departmental faculty are typically scored by their students in the 4.0-5.0 range. On the Senior Exit Survey 90.4 % of graduating seniors over a five year average rank the quality of instruction in the department as either excellent or good. The organization of the

curriculum was ranked on a five year average at 97.6 % (either excellent or good), and the attitude of the faculty to students was rated at 96.8 % (either excellent or good). The average GPA (over five years) for program graduates is 3.23.

The quality of this program's ability to respond to change and improvement is both dramatic and extraordinary. During the past five years, the departmental faculty have shown tremendous energy and creative ability to strengthen the work of the program in Philosophy and Religious Studies. In so doing, this department has demonstrated clearly that the quality of its program is very strong.

#### **Section IV–Program Viability**

#### **IV. Summary Conclusion of the Program's Viability at VSU**

Based on the productivity and quality findings, establish a summary conclusion of the program's viability at VSU. Include any additional detailed data analyses, interpretations, rationales, and evidence necessary to support the summary conclusion of the program.

The department has grown significantly during the past five years—a 103.5 % increase in majors. The average class size has increased 25.7 % in the last five years. The number of majors graduated in the last five years was an average of 9.2, and in the last two years an average of 15. Enrollment in departmental courses remains strong. The five year average for basic required courses in the major (without the senior seminar) is 39.50. In the last six years the department has experienced phenomenal growth in the generation of student credit hours—an increase of 118% compared to an overall growth of approximately 20 % in the College of Arts and Sciences. The department scored at the 75<sup>th</sup> Percentile for the production of student credit hours per FTE on the Delaware Study (2006) and had high scores on the National Study of Instructional Costs and Productivity.

While it is clear that the program is emerging as a strong and productive unit within the university, the department has also demonstrated that the quality of its program is very strong as well. The department has moved away from an earlier “service orientation” and begun to establish itself as an autonomous, well functioning unit with the College of Arts and Sciences. The department has a diverse and energetic faculty where each member works within an active research agenda. Though small in size, this program has produced 26 published articles in the last five years. This faculty has also written 2 books, edited a volume of a journal, and participated in several archaeological expeditions. Several awards and nominations for awards have been garnered by this group including the VSU Excellence Award for Professional Development, the “Outstanding Student Award in Arts and Sciences,” and a nomination for a

GAYA Award (Georgia Author of the Year–2009). However, professional development has not come at the expense of service. One faculty member won the College of Arts and Sciences Award for Excellence in Service. Students continue to rank this faculty high (typically between 4.0–5.0) on the SOI. On the Senior Exit Survey, 90.4 % of program graduating seniors rank the quality of instruction as either excellent or good (on a 5 year average). The attitude of the faculty to the students was rated 96.9 % (either excellent or good) on the Senior Exit Survey (5 year average). The average GPA of program graduates (5 year average) is 3.23. In addition, it is also clear that this program has demonstrated a dramatic, if not extraordinary, ability to respond to change and make improvements.

Based on the leading indicators of productivity and quality, this program would have to be rated as a viable and well functioning unit which has distinguished itself in recent years in many of the aspects under scrutiny in this review

## **Section V–Program Improvement**

### **V. Program Quality and the Productivity Improvement Plan**

If the program is deemed viable, discuss plans and priorities for improving the program’s productivity and quality in the future. Especially address plans for those areas where improvement is needed (those rated as below average or notably deficient).

Though the program has shown dramatic improvement since the last review and has experienced a period of unprecedented growth, the policies and procedures for sustaining that growth have yet to be implemented on an ongoing basis. The program needs a plan for sustaining growth which includes an overall policy as well as individual strategies for recruitment and retention of students. Strategies of recruitment should include an understanding of how to market on a local level the two tracks of philosophy and religious studies. For example, the discipline of philosophy is undergoing a resurgence nationwide which also offers unique opportunities to the program at VSU. A recent New York Times article put the issue this way: “philosophy is being embraced at . . . universities by a new generation of college students who are drawing modern-day lessons from the age-old discipline as they try to make sense of their world, from the morality of the war in Iraq to the latest political scandal.”\* Some programs, such as the one at Rutgers, are up as much as 100 %. At Rutgers, “many students have double-majored in philosophy and . . . psychology or economics, in recent years, and go on to become doctors, lawyers, writers, investment bankers and even commodities traders.”\* Other double-majors include political science, or pre-law because philosophy emphasizes verbal and logic skills which are important to law schools. Rutgers encourages the double-major with pre-law because philosophy majors tend to score high on the LSAT.\* The program has potential for growth at VSU by encouraging a double major with the disciplines mentioned above.

A second opportunity for Philosophy and Religious Studies which has the potential to bolster the program is the current interest in Environmental Studies. In the Fall 2008, President Schloss created an advisory council to work on a presidential commitment for climate change on university campuses. A subcommittee of the council has expressed a need for two undergraduate

minors, one of which could be based in humanities with applied ethics course work. This could require special emphasis on courses offered by Philosophy and Religious Studies. These courses would include such topics as Ecology and World Religions, and Native American Traditions and the Environment, as well as specific courses already available in our catalog such as Ethical Theory, Social and Political Philosophy, Ethics and the Environment, Ethics and Public Policy, and Ethics and Public Administration. It is possible that in time such an initiative could grow into a "third track" for the program in Philosophy and Religious Studies. As noted in recent newspaper and magazine articles, philosophy is a growing area of interest in a number of businesses related to environmental ethics and technology. The skills of critical reasoning and logic, when brought to the applied ethics discussions of today's business world, ensure that philosophy majors will be welcome in today's job market.\*\*

A committee for sustaining program growth will be created. It will include three faculty members who participated in the re-organization of the department in 2002-2003. With the department head, they will discuss ways to enhance the growth of the department and will have the responsibility to draw up over all policies for enrollment growth as well as implementing the basic strategies necessary to market the program major in new ways.

\*Winnie Hu, "In a New Generation of College Students, Many Opt for the Life Examined," The New York Times (April 6, 2008).

\*\*See especially Diana Cole, "Learn Philosophy: The classic discipline can help with contemporary dilemmas and modern careers," U.S. News & World Report (December 18, 2008).

## **Section VI–Program Recommendation**

### **VI. Summary Recommendation**

Building upon your previous responses, provide a recommendation for the program. Establish whether the program should be expanded, maintained at its current level, reduced in scope, or consolidated/discontinued.

X Enhance or Expand the Program–The program is deemed to have high ratings or great potential for high ratings on program productivity and program quality. Significant strategic opportunities for program expansion exist.

   Maintain at the Current Level–The program is deemed to have satisfactory ratings on program productivity and program quality. Limited strategic opportunities for program enhancement and additional investment exist.

   Reduce the Program's Scope–The program is deemed to have low ratings and little potential for higher ratings on program productivity and program quality. Aspects of the program appear overextended and should be reduced to allow productivity and quality to improve.

The Program in Philosophy and Religious Studies should be enhanced and expanded. The program has gotten high ratings in both program productivity and quality. The program has grown significantly in recent years—majors have grown by 103.5 %; class size has increased by 25.8 %; graduation rates have improved by 102 % averaging 15 in each of the last two years; enrollment in program completion courses (without the capstone) is strong at a five year average of 39.50. The department has shown phenomenal growth in the generation of student credit hours per FTE faculty (on the Delaware Study) with an increase of 118 % (for the 5 year period ending 2006-7). This put the department at the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile. The department also had high scores on the National Study of Instructional Costs and Productivity.

Likewise the program gets high marks for quality. The program has in place a very strong and award winning faculty who routinely get high marks on their SOIs and on the Senior Exit Survey. For the past five years, the average rating by seniors for quality of instruction was 90.4 %. The faculty is diverse and has an international and global perspective. The current nationwide resurgence in interest in philosophy provides a unique strategic opportunity for the program to grow at VSU. With the proper continued support the program in Philosophy and Religious Studies can continue to grow and expand.