

PROPOSAL TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY

TITLE: Revision of the name of and requirements for the BALAS in Religious Studies

SPONSOR: Robert McKim, Department of Religion, 3072 Foreign Languages Building, MC 166; 3-0473.

COLLEGE SPONSOR: Ann M. Mester, Associate Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, 294 Lincoln Hall, 333-1350; mester@illinois.edu

BRIEF DESCRIPTION:

The proposed revision will make the following general changes:

1. Rename the major to correspond to the new name of the unit.
2. Reduce the eight "core course" requirements to four courses, in order to increase the number of options for students;
3. Add a course on methodological issues in the study of religion;
4. Add a general requirement of four courses of "additional required coursework" to improve the balance between the study of Asian and Western traditions, and to provide students with additional flexibility;
5. Revise the current requirements for the areas of concentration in Asian Religions, Christianity, Islam, and Judaica to standardize the requirements across all these areas;
5. Revise the current requirements for the Religion and Culture concentration to tighten its disciplinary focus;
6. Eliminate the current area of concentration in Biblical Studies.
7. Add a new area of concentration in "Religion in America" to reflect the addition of faculty with expertise in this area and to provide new opportunities for our students.

The specific changes are detailed in the attached summary sheet (Appendix 1). The proposed changes will reduce the total coursework required for the current major and structured supporting coursework from 54 hours to 51 hours. No changes to the minor are proposed.

JUSTIFICATION:

The major in Religion expanded rapidly from being the program of study for 1-2 students per year in the mid 1990s to 25-35 students per year currently. This level has remained fairly constant over the last five years, and the Department has concluded that it is possible to increase further the number of majors. The Department has undertaken two extensive reviews of the major curriculum, first in fall of 2003 and again more recently in

2006-2007. The review had several aims: 1) to determine changes that might increase the number of majors in Religion; 2) to improve the balance between Western and non-Western areas in the program of study; 3) to integrate the expertise of faculty added to the Department since the original structure of the major was put in place. These two reviews produced the following conclusions:

1. The Department has new faculty and new course offerings. We want the major to reflect these new opportunities. In particular, we are introducing a new area of concentration, Religion in America.
2. The current core course requirements are weighted too heavily in the direction of the history and literature of Western cultures. Revision of the requirements is necessary to reflect the growing scholarly expertise in the literatures, cultures, and religious traditions of the Asian continent and to improve the Department's ability to contribute to the emphasis in the College on global studies. At the same time, it is not advisable simply to add more requirements to the major.
3. The requirements for the "tradition-based" areas (Asian, Christianity, Islam, Judaica) should be standardized.
4. Majors would benefit from a seminar devoted to method in the study of religion and to the further development of research skills in this area.
5. The current Religion and Culture area of concentration needs to be better structured. (This option has been chosen by over 80% of our majors in recent years.)
6. The current number of faculty is insufficient to support an area of concentration in Biblical Studies.
7. We have modified the language requirement without compromising the standards that students must meet.

It remains a goal of the Department to strengthen our contribution to the initiatives of the College in the area of global studies. To meet this aim, the revised major includes a component entitled "additional required coursework" that balances the study of both Western and non-Western traditions and cultures. Moreover, the Department judged that it is beneficial to require a "senior seminar" that focuses on historical and contemporary theories of religion. Finally, the proposed new major is referred to here as the "major in religion" since we have recently changed our status from a Program to a Department, with an attendant change in name from the Program for the Study of Religion to the Department of Religion.

BUDGETARY AND STAFF IMPLICATIONS

No additional staff is requested to implement these changes, nor is there any request for increased resources in library, laboratories, or computer facilities.

The new seminar will be required of majors who enter the Department beginning the effective date of the new curriculum. It will be offered once a year, and the

Department can accommodate this course with its current faculty. Modest shifts in enrollment can be anticipated for the following courses taught by other departments. Declines of enrollment in HIST 140, 141, 142, 143. Currently, majors can fulfill core requirements with a two-semester sequence in History or in Comparative World Literatures. Approximately 4-6 students each year choose the history sequence. The proposed changes can be expected to diminish that enrollment only modestly, since a number of majors will take those courses anyway.

GUIDELINES FOR UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION:

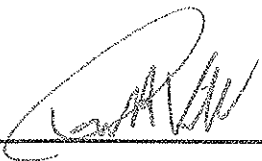
The proposed revision will continue to meet the Guidelines for Undergraduate Education.

1. The revised core curriculum includes coursework that is specifically directed toward further improvement of critical reading and writing skills.
2. In the "additional required coursework" component and in the introduction of the "Religion in America" area of concentration, the Department affirms its commitment to deepening the understanding of the heterogeneity of American culture and examining in depth global cultures. The revised major will ensure that students become well acquainted with non-Western religions, as they are encountered both domestically and internationally.
3. The Department contributes to the professional preparation of undergraduates in a broad manner by preparing students to have the critical skills to encounter foreign cultures and to understand the bases of these cultures in historical traditions.

CLEARANCES:

 10/12/07

Department of Religion

 10/18/07

School of Literatures, Cultures, and Linguistics

 5/1/08

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Office of the Provost

Proposed effective date: upon approval