

Response to Program Review Standards

**Philosophy and Religion Department
College of Arts and Sciences
Western Carolina University**

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Academic Program Review is a component of Western Carolina University's Strategic Planning and Institutional Effectiveness System. The primary purpose of this document is to advance the quality of core teaching and learning, research, professional activity, and public service/academic outreach functions in our program through a periodic system of review. This document is structured as follows: Standard One describes the purpose of the Philosophy and Religion department and how that purpose supports the mission and strategic vision of Western Carolina University and its College of Arts and Sciences. Standard Two describes the department's planning efforts and how those efforts align with the University's priorities. Standard Three explains the department's curriculum and its focus on engaged student learning. Standard Four discusses faculty resources and their ability to meet the goals of the department. Standard Five outlines how we attract and retain high-quality students. Standard Six describes the administrative structure of the department and how that structure helps the department to meet its objectives. Finally, Standard Seven discusses how we manage our available resources within the department.

Standard 1. The purpose of the program reflects and supports the mission and strategic vision of Western Carolina University (hereafter, "WCU") and the mission of its College.

The Philosophy and Religion department (hereafter, "PAR") furthers the both the general goals of WCU and the specific goals of its College of Arts and Sciences. In line with the university's slogan, PAR intends through its curriculum and faculty interaction with students and the community to help those who aspire to make a difference in their world. The mission statements of the University and of the College (Appendices 1.1 and 1.2) share (1) the central goal of providing education for effective participation in contemporary life and (2) a commitment to engaged learning. This goal and this commitment also appear in the University's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), the University's response to the UNC Tomorrow report, and in the Boyer model of scholarship which has been supported by and incorporated into PAR's Department Collegial Review Document (DCRD) (Appendix 4.5). The PAR department aims explicitly to meet these two aspects of the University's and the College's mission.

First, the central goal of our department is to provide excellence in teaching and learning by bringing to the classroom the best scholarship in our field. We attain this goal by providing the highest standards of inquiry and knowledge in philosophy and in religion, as well as those practices that enable students to acquire philosophical proficiencies, understandings, and dispositions that will last a lifetime. As the University's mission statement puts it, WCU seeks to provide "academic programs ... to improve individual lives." In the words of the College's mission statement, "[t]he role of the College of Arts and Sciences is to implement the University's Mission through exploration of a broad range of human experience, knowledge, and expression... [to] provide the basic skills and perspectives essential for preparing all university students for effective participation in contemporary life." Meeting this goal is the primary purpose of PAR. As we say in our mission

statement: “The mission of the Department of Philosophy and Religion is to foster an engaged community with the moral and intellectual skills necessary for meaningful work, community, and leadership” (for our mission statement, see appendix 1.3). The PAR major is structured to provide exactly this kind of education. The PAR department offers courses that help every student who studies with us, both majors and non-majors, develop the core liberal arts skills of oral and written communication and critical thinking (for details of the PAR curriculum, see the response to Standard 3).

In order to provide education for effective participation in contemporary life, the College of Arts and Sciences offers a Liberal Studies program to provide the basic skills and perspectives essential for preparing all university students and it supports the Honors College in offering honors-level courses. PAR fully supports the college in both of these programs. In the first place, the majority of PAR courses are also Liberal Studies courses. PAR offers twenty-eight different courses as part of the Liberal Studies Perspectives (more than any other department except history, which is twice as large and is the only department with its own Liberal Studies Perspective). Additionally, PAR offers on average between two and three Honors courses every semester. In the past three years, only the English department (which is several times larger than PAR) has taught more sections of honors courses. In fact, the small PAR department has taught roughly 10% of all Honors courses for the university.

The PAR department also provides extracurricular experiences to make WCU a place of intellectual vitality. Towards this end, our department sponsors the undergraduate Philosophy Club and its series of events; “The Gadfly,” an undergraduate journal of social criticism and satire; film series (including one on social justice and one on eastern religions); and at least one invited speaker and/or presentation of a faculty member's work every semester. The department also periodically sponsors the North Carolina Religious Studies Association conference and annually sponsors the Personalist Forum which brings a conference on American philosophy to campus. The PAR faculty also organizes the Jerry Jackson lectures every semester, cosponsored with the Honors College.

Second, PAR supports the university and college’s commitment to engaged learning. As the university’s mission statement says, “Western Carolina University creates *engaged* learning opportunities that incorporate teaching, research and service.” The College in turn “supports the University’s declared aspirations through discipline-related activities that benefit the University, region, state, nation, and the international community ... [through] research, creative activity, and scholarly pursuits.” Our responses to Standard Three (Curriculum) and Standard Five (Faculty Resources) provide more detail, but here we highlight some key points about how the PAR department shares this commitment to engaged student learning. Our goal is to produce students who have a deep understanding not only of philosophical and religious ideas but also of the relevance of those ideas to law, to medicine, to science, to the environment, and to one’s role as a citizen. Such preparation requires the skills in critical thinking, openness to ideas, public speaking, and in persuasive writing that this department offers. As a result, our graduates should be as well-prepared for vocations in medicine, law, business, ministry, social work,

and counseling, as they are for graduate work in Philosophy or Religious Studies. Moreover, the Department has an extraordinarily strong record of encouraging students to present their work in public forums. We involve our students as active scholars through a variety of undergraduate research opportunities. As part of the capstone course, for instance, each graduating student must give a public presentation summarizing his or her senior research project. All upper-level majors are also encouraged to participate in the Undergraduate Expo at WCU each year. And even more telling is our record of sending students to the National Conference of Undergraduate Research (NCUR). WCU takes undergraduate research seriously: of the 319 universities represented at the NCUR 2010 conference, WCU had 80 projects accepted – the second most of all participating schools, and more than any other school in the UNC system. In the past three years, PAR has sponsored 26 students who were accepted by and presented at NCUR (for details of students’ work, see Appendix 5.4), and in 2010, PAR sponsored more students than any other department at WCU.

The PAR department understands engagement in terms of WCU’s commitment to community service. The program in philosophy (especially in its strong emphasis on ethics and justice) and the program in religion (in its attention to religious teachings on compassion and concern for the less advantaged) have stressed this from their origins. The department seeks to produce not only graduates who are financially successful but also citizens who are well-rounded morally and who understand and work for social justice. To that end, PAR offers a number of courses in applied ethics and sociopolitical theory, and we are offering our first service learning designated course this spring, PAR 354: “Religion, Suffering, and the Moral Imagination.”

Standard 2. The program engages in ongoing, systematic planning that is reflective of the University’s strategic priorities.

A. Program’s strategic goals/objectives

Ongoing strategic planning in PAR aims at placing the department squarely within the University’s mission “to create engaged learning opportunities that incorporate research and service through residential, distance education, and international experiences to improve individual lives and enhance economic and community development in the region, state, and nation” (see appendix 1.1). The specific goals and objectives are outlined in the departmental strategic plan (see appendix 2.1). This plan was developed by Dr. Hale and Dr. McLachlan in 2003 and revised each year up to 2007. The department has achieved almost all of the goals of that plan over the last several years. Specifically, one of the goals (number 6 on the strategic plan’s list) was to increase the number of majors, and over the last five years we have significantly increased that number from fewer than ten to (at present) over forty. Another goal (number 7 on that list) was to add new full time faculty positions to fulfill our responsibilities in Liberal Studies, and in the past four years PAR has added three new faculty positions: Dr. Whitmire in 2005; a new department head, Dr. Schilbrack in 2008; and an instructor in environmental ethics and philosophy, Dr. Henderson, also in 2008. Another goal (number 8 on that list) was to

develop the concentration in religion and, in 2009, with the hire of a department head who is a religious studies specialist the department reorganized and streamlined that concentration. Another goal (number 10 on the strategic plan's list) was to reduce faculty loads from a 4/4 schedule to a 3/3 teaching load, and we were able to achieve this through the action of the Provost. This change has already had a positive effect on the quantity and quality of faculty scholarship.

B. Process for developing and modifying goals/objectives

Prior to AY 2009-10, the PAR department developed and modified our student learning objectives as a group, based on our observations in our classes and on anecdotal evidence. In that year, however, the department developed a Quality Enhancement Plan that includes an assessment process for all students who complete the PAR program. Central to this plan is an evaluation of the skills of each student, first, when she or he enters the PAR program (in our gateway course, PAR 295) and then again when she or he completes the program (by taking the capstone course, PAR 495). In addition, this assessment plan has each student complete a student evaluation of the PAR Program. (Summaries of the faculty evaluation of PAR students and the student evaluations of the program are available in the PAR office.) In addition, that assessment plan also created a departmental Assessment Committee which reviews these two complementary kinds of evaluation and recommends modifications to the program goals based on that data at the end of each school year. And that committee is also in the process of developing a long-term plan for assessing the work of the PAR program on students other than our majors (for example, in our liberal studies courses). Ideally, then, we see the process of self-assessment as a circle. The PAR departmental has an explicit set of program goals and student learning objectives; we evaluate the extent that we are successful in reaching those goals with the methods described in this paragraph; and we then modify our program based on those evaluations. As we implement those modifications, we begin the process of self-assessment again so that the program is continually being reviewed in the light of the faculty evaluations of student program and student evaluations of the program's success.

The PAR department meets on a regular monthly schedule. As a small department, PAR critically reflects on our teaching, our curriculum, and our program objectives as a whole. The small size of the department enables us to be both collegial and agile in developing and modifying program goals, and therefore the strategic planning done by the Assessment Committee is informed by the views of the whole department.

C. Process of implementing program goals/objectives

The PAR department implements its program goals and objectives primarily in three ways. First, the curricula of the philosophy program and of the religious studies program are both designed to lead students exactly through the five skills we want our students to develop in the two concentrations. Thus, the primary way that we implement our student leaning objectives is through our courses and the way that they are structured.

Second, the PAR faculty has a special focus on encouraging undergraduate research as a means for our students to develop the skills measured in our program goals. One sees this special focus both in our request that our senior students develop and present the research done in their senior capstone course and, more broadly, in the department's commitment to encouraging undergraduate research. (As described under Standard 1, above, the PAR faculty sponsored more students to the National Conference on Undergraduate Research in 2010 than any other department at WCU.) Third, like other departments at WCU, the PAR department supports the university's commitment to engaged education. Consequently, the PAR faculty seek to implement our program goals through extracurricular student engagement activities, such as taking students on the Environmental Ethics trip to West Virginia to study mountain top removal, organizing the Jerry Jackson lecture series, and sponsoring the activities of the students' Philosophy and Religion Club. (For more on student engagement in PAR, see 3B, below.)

Standard 3. The program provides and evaluates a high quality curriculum that emphasizes student learning as its primary purpose.

A. Curriculum Rationale and Outcomes

The Department of Philosophy and Religion stresses both formal and substantive (that is, both skills-centered and content-centered) student learning, as we believe both are necessary to prepare students for meaningful work, community, and leadership. Although there is no professional accrediting agency that assigns measures for proficiency in philosophy or religion, our departmental objectives are consistent with the general consensus of professionals in both fields regarding undergraduate education. The formal objectives concern general, core liberal arts skills of communication and critical thinking. Specifically, students who graduate from our department will be able to write and speak clearly and persuasively, and will be able to read and think analytically and synthetically. The substantive objectives concern discipline-specific content, namely, knowledge of philosophical and religious traditions and of the conceptual tools for thinking about truth, beauty, and the moral good. That is, students will learn central views in the history of philosophy (in the Concentration in Philosophy) or in the history of religions (in the Concentration in Religion), and will be able to reflect evaluatively on the views of the thinkers and traditions they study. Given this overarching vision of an education in Philosophy and Religion, we derive the following specific learning outcomes.

Students who graduate from our department with a *concentration in philosophy* will be able to:

1. Identify and clearly articulate philosophical arguments, uncover and challenge hidden assumptions, and evaluate adequate and inadequate solutions to a wide range of complex problems.
2. Analyze the strengths, weaknesses, and implications of a wide array of moral theories, and apply these theories to contemporary moral problems.
3. Recognize the origins and historical development, continuity/discontinuity, and

cultural conditions characterizing important texts, theories, individuals, movements and institutions in the history of philosophy.

4. Assess critically the theoretical/epistemic foundations, knowledge-claims, methods and evidences of justification, of other academic disciplines (e.g. natural science, political science) and cultural practices (e.g. art, literature, law).
5. Construct and persuasively argue for their own systematic philosophical position(s) by integrating the logical-moral foundations, historical discernment, multi-disciplinary connections, and systematic theorizing acquired in their earlier training.

In the philosophy concentration, students commence their studies with courses that begin building their proficiencies in critical reading and reasoning (Outcome 1) and systematic moral reflection (Outcome 2) through our basic logic course, PAR 230; and either PAR 102, “Western Moral Traditions,” or PAR 101, “Western Philosophical Traditions” (which contains a substantial ethics component). They continue to enhance their reasoning skills with further courses that build on their facility for assessing logical arguments. Through subsequent courses in the history of philosophy, advanced moral theory, and philosophy and culture, students reinforce and refine their basic knowledge of central moral thinkers and traditions, and practice applying moral theory to concrete situations.

Students develop historical discernment and understanding of important figures and themes (Outcome 3) by taking a series of courses in the history of philosophy. As is expected in our discipline, students are required to take both an ancient (PAR 304) and modern (PAR 306) philosophy course, as well as one other course in the history of philosophy. Students are advised to take PAR 304 early in the curriculum, and to follow that up with courses in historical sequence, in order to develop incrementally a more complete understanding of the historical and cultural continuities and criticisms of thinkers and their positions.

Students develop the skills necessary for the critical assessment of the theoretical foundations of other disciplines, professions, and cultural practices (Outcome 4) by completing three courses (of their choice) in the philosophy and culture section of our curriculum, e.g. Art (PAR 310), Science (PAR 311), Religion (PAR 312), or Law (PAR 313). Finally, students learn to think systematically and construct their own philosophical positions (Outcome 5) through the intensive examination of a particular philosopher or philosophical movement in both a senior seminar and a senior capstone project. In this way, they learn to inter-connect diverse views on metaphysics, logic, ethics, and socio-political theory, in the context of making a positive case for a position(s) of their own.

Students who graduate from our department with a *concentration in religion* will be able to:

1. Identify and clearly articulate the major texts, figures, movements, and institutions in the history of some religious traditions.
2. Distinguish and use interpretive, explanatory, and evaluative approaches to religious beliefs and practices.

3. Analyze connections between religion and other cultural practices and institutions (e.g., politics, gender, economics, race).
4. Reflect critically on religious beliefs and practices through the application of a variety of philosophical frameworks.
5. Construct and persuasively argue for their own reflective position on religious questions, integrating the variety of disciplinary approaches acquired in their earlier training.

The concentration in religion was revised in 2009 to reflect the increased strength of the PAR faculty to support that course of study. In the religion concentration, students begin their coursework by acquiring the foundational ‘data’ of their studies (Outcome 1), including the chief figures, texts, and movements of various religions (PAR 145, 146); as well as the variety of analytical approaches (Outcome 2) to religious studies (PAR 242, 312). They continue to build on their knowledge of religious beliefs and practices through the study of particular religious tradition(s) and the relation of religions to other aspects of culture. They continue to expand the number and complexity of their analytical approaches to religion through subsequent courses that stress philosophical reflection on religious traditions.

Students develop their understanding of the connection of religion to other cultural practices and institutions (Outcome 3) by way of courses in our department and others (such as English, History, and Anthropology). This interdisciplinary approach reflects our belief that religious studies is properly an interdisciplinary field, and fits perfectly with the goal of WCU’s QEP to help students understand how different kinds of knowledge can be integrated.

A distinguishing feature of our department’s humanistic approach to the study of religion is that, in addition to providing students with interdisciplinary opportunities to reflect on the connections of religion to other aspects of culture by way of a variety of analytical approaches, we also emphasize critical (normative) reflection on religion (Outcome 4). Often, questions regarding the truth-value or moral status of religious beliefs and practices remain un-asked in a purely social-scientific approach to the study of religion. By contrast, students in our curriculum begin to develop the skills necessary for normative reflection through taking three upper-division courses in our department. They further hone that reflective capacity, learning to think systematically and construct their own positions on religious questions, through a senior seminar and a senior capstone project, as in the philosophy concentration. In this way, although Outcomes 1-4 necessarily differ somewhat in the two concentrations, they are both intended to provide a route to Outcome 5, which in both concentrations requires the students to demonstrate that they have acquired and synthesized the moral and intellectual skills necessary for meaningful work, community, and leadership that we outline in our response to Standard 1, and the first paragraph of our response to Standard 3.

The PAR curricula grow from the program’s learning objectives, and we seek continually to critically reflect on our pedagogical practices and to improve the program, as described in Standard 2.

B. Student Engagement

The chief engaged learning experience that we provide all our majors is the opportunity to do supervised undergraduate research in philosophy or religion in their senior seminar and/or capstone project. This forces students to engage in systematic, persuasive argumentation for a position they have constructed, in light of the current research in a particular area of philosophy or religious studies. As we take a large part of our departmental mission to be serving the college and university mission, however, we have not limited research opportunities to PAR majors only: we routinely offer Honors contracts to Honors students (majors and non-majors alike) who would like to do undergraduate research in non-Honors sections of our courses. We also offered one “Honors tutorial” each fall from 2005-2008. These tutorials – highly intensive courses of 5-8 Honors scholars each, based on the British tutorial system – required an intensive mentored research project of each student in the course. (While a number of these students went on to become philosophy majors, many others went on to utilize the moral and intellectual skills they developed in our courses in other fields and majors.) An external measure of the success of our curriculum in seriously engaging students over the past several years is the exceptional number of students who have been accepted to present work at the National Conference for Undergraduate Research, as well as at WCU’s Undergraduate Expo (see appendix 5.4).

A second opportunity for engagement and synthetic learning we provide our students is the Jerry Jackson Lecture in the Humanities series, which our department co-sponsors with the Honors College. This series consists of roughly 3-4 lay-friendly philosophy or religion lectures or events per year, plus 2-3 other talks in various arts and humanities fields. Although the PAR Assessment Committee does not presently evaluate whether such extra-curricular events meet the learning objectives of our program, we are interested in developing ways to assess the impact that our engaged activities have on the students who attend and participate.

C. Degree Length, Rigor, and Interdisciplinarity

The bachelor’s degree in philosophy consists of 120 hours; both concentrations require a total of 30 curricular credit hours, 6 hours of a foreign language, and a second major, minor, or approved program. The degree can thus be completed easily within four years (for four-year plans see appendix 3.7). The fact that very few students have taken a philosophy or religion course prior to enrolling at the University means that we have to attract majors who have already matriculated. While we will discuss the strength of our curriculum in attracting, retaining, and graduating excellent students in our response to Standard 5, it should be noted here that over the past three years, English is the only department at WCU that has offered more sections of Honors courses than our department. From fall 2006 through spring 2010, we provided 18 honors sections (including three Honors tutorials), out of approximately 150 total honors sections offered by the University. The willingness of the Honors College to rely on our relatively small department to teach roughly 10% of all honors sections offered in that time speaks to the rigor of our curriculum and the success of our student learning outcomes, especially with respect to high-quality students.

All of the student learning outcomes of our curriculum described above contribute to the formation of a well-rounded, liberally-educated citizen, and we take a large part of our departmental mission to be bound up with the overall mission of the University and the College of Arts and Sciences. Given the emphasis on understanding and assessing the theoretical frameworks of other disciplines and practices, as well as the inter-connection of religion to other cultural practices, our curriculum as a whole (and particular courses therein) provides numerous opportunities for interdisciplinary work. Many students in other disciplines, therefore, elect to take lower division and/or 300-level PAR courses for Liberal Studies credit, particularly courses that connect well with their major discipline.

Since our major requires a relatively low number of hours, we consistently have a large number of double majors, some of whom decide to add the philosophy major in their sophomore or junior year. In the last five years philosophy majors have graduated or are currently on track to graduate with a dual major or second degree in Spanish, English, Political Science, Biology, and Psychology. In addition, to assist some students who do not discover philosophy until their second or third year, we also participate in the Honors College's Humanities program, providing a 27-hour version of both our major concentrations that is intended to help students finish and better inter-connect two majors in different humanities disciplines within four years. In lieu of a capstone seminar or independent research project, these students complete three separate 1-hour interdisciplinary courses on Humanities in the region, nation, and world that are intended to help them bridge their two chosen disciplines over their sophomore, junior, and senior years.

Standard 4. The PAR program currently has sufficient faculty resources to meet its mission and goals.

Since the UNC Program Review of 2000-1, the Philosophy and Religion department has grown considerably. At that time, the department had only three fulltime faculty, and they struggled to cover the variety of courses offered, then primarily only in the area of Philosophy. Since then, PAR has enhanced our offerings in Ethics, History of Philosophy, and Philosophy and Culture (including courses in philosophy and law, film, medicine, and the environment), and developed a second concentration in religion. We also added a "gateway" seminar course that seeks to develop the research skills of each student who declares a major in either philosophy or religious studies, and a capstone seminar course that gives students the opportunity to synthesize their cumulative learning in the major. The department also includes a fulltime term instructor position in Environmental Ethics who supports the department's and university's commitment to engaged learning and who has developed stronger interdisciplinary ties to our Natural Science colleagues, although budget cuts have blocked the conversion of that position to tenure-track until now. That search was reopened in 2010.

One result of this re-designed curriculum is that the number of PAR majors and graduates has grown remarkably. Accordingly, the department now has grown to five tenured or tenure-track faculty (plus lecturer and adjunct positions). Three of these faculty members are tenured (two at full, one at associate) and the two

assistant professors applied for tenure and promotion in the fall of 2010. The PAR faculty is therefore diverse with regard to age, rank, and tenure status. However, one concern is that the PAR faculty is not diverse with regard to area of disciplinary expertise. Of the six tenured and tenure track faculty (including here the Environmental Ethics professor), two have their degrees in religious studies, with a specialization in philosophy of religion; the other four all earned their degrees in philosophy. The number of PAR students who choose the concentration in religion is now greater than the number choosing the concentration in philosophy, and therefore the expertise of the present members of the department does not reflect the growing student interest in religion.

The faculty of the PAR department is also not diverse in terms of ethnicity, race, or gender. For many years, the department has been committed to increasing its gender diversity. Though we have attempted several times to hire a fulltime member of the faculty who would alleviate the traditionally low percentage of female philosophers, we have been unsuccessful so far in our offers. At present, we have two female part-time instructors in Religion, though we continue to hope that future hires will enable us both to increase our gender diversity as well as provide female advising and retention skills for attracting more women students.

Full-time faculty teach three three-hour courses per semester, with the exception of the visiting and lecturer positions, each of whom teaches four courses per semester. The faculty therefore typically teaches nine hours per semester, though they often also teach independent study courses, especially for those seniors who choose the option of meeting the capstone requirement with an individualized research project (the equivalent of a 30-page paper). Hence, several members of the faculty regularly teach twelve hours per semester. Class sizes have been increased to thirty-five (excluding Honors sections and seminar courses, which are capped at twenty-five). The commitment of the PAR program to Liberal Studies is shown by the extremely large percentage of courses that we offer that count for Liberal Studies Perspectives electives. Accordingly, the Philosophy and Religion Department generates a significant number of student credit hours for the university Liberal Studies program. All our upper level courses emphasize proficiencies in critical reasoning, problem-solving, moral reflection, and lifelong learning, and such courses engage both non-majors excited by the philosophical habit of mind for the first time and majors or minors who are intrigued by further philosophical inquiry and exploration.

In order to accomplish the PAR program's central mission of teaching and learning, it is crucial that our students learn from faculty who are highly qualified and actively engaged scholars and learners themselves. All five fulltime faculty and our Lecturer have the highest terminal degrees in their fields, the Ph. D (5) or Th. D (1). We come from a diversity of prestigious doctoral programs (University of Chicago Divinity School, University of Illinois-Chicago, University of Toronto, Vanderbilt University, Villanova University), each of which has added a variety of strengths to a combined department in Philosophy and Religion. Accordingly, our department is distinctive as a place where most faculty work in the intersection between these two fields, for example, in Philosophy of Religion, Philosophical Theology, Religion and Ethics. (We provide a complete list of the fulltime faculty, along with their academic credentials, in their curriculum vitae appearing in Appendix 4.1.)

Each member of the fulltime faculty has published in leading journals in the field, and the full professors

have published books in the area of philosophy of religion. Most faculty continue to pursue traditional lines of research, what the Boyer model adopted by WCU calls “scholarship of discovery,” but the department follows the Boyer model in recognizing as well the value of scholarship of integration, of application, and of teaching. The faculty also takes seriously the obligation to serve other disciplines, colleges, and the greater community of which we are a part. Thus, several have spoken on ethics to a variety of disciplines for several colleges (Computer Science, Communication Disorders, Business College) and some have led discussions of new books through the Coulter Faculty Commons.

Most of the PAR faculty has taken advantage of the faculty development opportunities (pedagogical strategies, course design, etc.) offered by the Coulter Faculty Commons, and others have been invited to advise our colleagues in integrating Ethics into a variety of disciplines across the university. There are opportunities for scholarly paper presentations through the NC Philosophical Society, the NC Religious Studies Association, and the Personalist Forum Conference, all of which meet in, or are accessible from, our region. The PAR faculty has also sponsored student papers for presentation at several of these conferences.

In 2008, we created a new document for faculty review, tenure, and promotion (see appendix 4.4). This Collegial Review Document specifies the conditions required for reappointment, tenure, and promotion; it is consistent with other departmental standards across the university; and it gives junior faculty specifics about what is expected of them for reappointment, tenure, and promotion.

In light of the recent renovations to the Stillwell Science building, which houses the PAR offices, we find the improvements very conducive to our continuing to be able to teach, advise, and otherwise work with students, as well as conduct scholarly writing and research. Our new Dean of the Library is a philosopher, and we have a very good working relationship with the library in terms of updating its holdings for our own research needs and for student scholarly activities. As a result, the members of the PAR faculty have been leaders in sponsoring students for the national, disciplinary, and WCU conferences for undergraduate research. Insofar as we have no graduate programs, we enjoy taking advantage of the undergraduate mentoring and evaluation opportunities provided by these channels. For our upcoming graduates, they present their senior seminar research papers and theses to the faculty in our new seminar/conference room.

On the basis of all the above considerations, we conclude that the Philosophy and Religion department consists of committed teachers, who remain active scholars in their fields. They see the humanistic disciplines of Liberal Studies as in conversation with the fields of philosophy and religion, and they therefore foster student learning not only in Philosophy and Religion, but also offer courses that enhance cultural, moral, social, and political reflection, and stress cumulative, integrative learning. We therefore judge that the Philosophy and Religion department offers an “enriched major” (in Ernest Boyer’s telling phrase from *Scholarship Reconsidered*) in the sense that this faculty stresses that the ultimate goal of university education is not merely to prepare for careers but to “construct lives of human dignity and purpose” (again, Boyer’s incisive phrasing), using their knowledge gained at the university to strive to live reflectively, humanely and hence wisely in concert

with others.

Standard 5. The program attracts, retains, and graduates high quality students.

A. Growth and Viability of the Program

PAR has grown rapidly in the past ten years. In 1999, PAR had just five majors. Today, we have forty-seven, and we have had eight semesters in a row with more than forty majors. Since 1999, the WCU total enrollment has gone from 5,902 to 9,429. Thus, PAR's growth outpaces the growth in the general student population several fold. We are also outpacing average growth for undergraduate majors in religion nationally (which is 22% over the last ten years, according to the American Academy of Religion's website) and, we expect, also for philosophy.

Our number of majors compares favorably to peer institutions. For example, we have had 10% to 20% more majors than Salisbury University for each of the past five years, where the undergraduate population is just a bit larger than WCU's. And Georgia Southern University has slightly fewer majors in its philosophy and religion programs combined but also has a total student population that is double ours.

Like all of WCU, PAR has a very homogenous student population. In the past five years, anywhere from 90% to 100% of our majors have identified themselves as white. This compares to an undergraduate population that is approximately 85% white. Our majors are also predominantly male, with a male-to-female ratio of 3-to-1. That puts us exactly in line with the national average for philosophy majors, though we do not have the representation of female students found in most religious studies programs.

We believe that the growth of the Department of Philosophy and Religion during the past ten years was fueled primarily by our ongoing efforts to develop classes and teaching methods that students find relevant and interesting, and which complement the curricula of other undergraduate programs at WCU. Years ago, the department tweaked its traditional course titles and redesigned its offerings to suit contemporary interests and the needs of a comprehensive state university. For example, we changed the title of "Modern Philosophy" to "Science, Reason, and Autonomy in the Enlightenment" and we created courses like "Religion, Suffering, and the Moral Imagination" and "Philosophy, Faith, and Imagination," wherein students read not only traditional philosophy like Kierkegaard, but also more accessible texts by J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis. We still teach classic and challenging philosophical texts, of course, but we situate them in contexts that are aimed to make them accessible and meaningful to WCU's undergraduate population.

We are continuing our efforts to adapt and develop relevant courses in this spirit, and thus we are confident that we will continue to attract good students, and to provide both our majors and Liberal Studies students a meaningful, engaging education. In short, we are optimistic about the future viability of the department. One worry with respect to our viability that should be acknowledged concerns the place of an environmental philosopher on our faculty. Many students choose WCU in part because they appreciate the

beauty and the importance of the surrounding Smoky Mountains, and WCU has vibrant programs in the Department of Geosciences and Natural Resources, the Highlands Biological Station, and the Environmental Stewardship Club. Naturally, many students are interested in environmental philosophy, and this position epitomizes the university's focus on engaged student learning. Since the departure of Dr. Dane Scott in 2005, however, we have not had a tenure-line faculty member with expertise in environmental philosophy, and we believe that this has hampered our ability to serve our students, as well as the University and the wider community.

B. Guidance, Engagement, and Retention

The PAR department divides the responsibility for advising among the departmental faculty. Thus we seek to monitor the progress of each student carefully and to offer each personal guidance. We use a combination of reports provided through Banner (our online reporting tool), and our departmental check sheet to track each student's progress. Check sheets, printed reports, and related documents, including a folder on each student who majors in one of our concentrations, are kept on file in the departmental office.

As part of the ongoing QEP implementation, the PAR department made changes meant to enhance student retention and graduation. First, the university is implementing an Electronic Briefcase (essentially, an electronic binder in which a student will both plan and track her progress in college and beyond) and as this becomes available, we will require students in our courses to add to it projects designed to help them actively shape and take ownership of their undergraduate studies in the context of a meaningfully life. The thrust of those projects (or better, of the process of creating them) is to get students to reflect on their life goals and the role that education will play in helping to achieve them. The documents will be revised several times throughout a student's college career with the aim of fostering the student's reflection and intentional growth.

A second part of our QEP planning concerns service learning and civic engagement. We recognize the value of service learning, and have now begun to integrate it into our curriculum. We offered the department's first service-learning course in Spring 2010 and are currently in discussion about how best to make service learning an integral part of our programs.

Standard 6: The program has an administrative structure that facilitates achievement of program goals and objectives.

The department has a Tenure, Promotion, and Reappointment (TPR) committee that consists of two tenured members of the department and one tenured member from outside the department and which meets as needed to make recommendations to the department head regarding TPR decisions. In 2010, two members of the PAR faculty, Dr. Hoyt and Dr. Whitmire, applied for tenure and promotion and therefore we hope that the PAR TPR Committee in the future will no longer need the help of faculty outside PAR. The department also

includes an Assessment Committee that consists of all the tenured and tenure track faculty in the department and which reviews the evaluations of the program that come from PAR 295 and PAR 495, the gateway and capstone courses. This means that the fixed term and adjunct faculty are not included in these two aspects of the administrative process. The department has a department head. He participates in the Department Head workshops every semester and in the Department Head Committee meetings with the dean of the College every other week. The department meets as a group once a month and operates largely on a consensus basis. The minutes of the PAR department meetings are available in the department office. The department head is evaluated by the departmental faculty and by the dean of the College at the end of every year.

The administrative structure of the department is intended to support the process of defining, modifying, and implementing the program. Here is an example of how the department conducts this process. In the fall of 2009, the department began its implementation of the university's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). Professor Hoyt was named as the department's QEP liaison. WCU's QEP focuses on the idea of *synthesis*, the ability of students to be intentional learners who are able to see and develop connections between their courses, between their curricular and extracurricular learning, and between their education and their life and career goals -- a focus wholeheartedly supported by the PAR program. At the same time, a review of the Annual Program Assessment in PAR revealed that the department did not have adequate data to report on how students in the PAR program were meeting the department's learning objectives. In the past, the PAR department relied heavily on student course evaluations and the senior seminar public presentations to assess the effectiveness of its program. In response to the university's QEP and the Annual Program Assessment, therefore, the PAR faculty created a new course required of all majors, PAR 295: "Self, Society, and the Good Life." This course was designed (1) to help PAR majors see and develop connections between their education and their life and career goals (2) to enable the PAR faculty to gather data on students as they entered our program. Two professors (Hoyt and Hale) were asked to draw up a syllabus for the course. The department as a whole developed a rubric by which to evaluate the students in that class in terms of the department's student learning objectives. The department head wrote the AA5 application for a new course and the AA6 proposal for a program change, submitted these to the college's Curriculum Committee, and then met with at committee to explain that change. That new course, PAR 295, is meeting for the first time in Spring 2011 and will provide data on students as they begin the PAR program; PAR 495 will then provide data on the same students on the same rubric as they complete the PAR program. The data gathered in these classes will then be evaluated at the end of each academic year by the PAR Assessment Committee.

Standard 7. The program has adequate resources to meet its goals and objectives.

The PAR Department's operating budget has been relatively stable for the last three years. In this time period, PAR has spent its budget primarily on faculty travel, on furniture and equipment, and on expenses related

to searches (see appendix 7.1). The PAR department seeks to fund travel by faculty members from its operating budget, though these funds must be augmented by the WCU Chancellor's Travel Fund, which cover up to \$1000 of expenses when presenting research at a meeting, and by micro-grants offered through the Coulter Faculty Commons. Each full-time faculty member is supplied with a computer, though the department also bought two printers and a scanner from its own funds.

We enjoy excellent library resources for a university of our size, in part because we have concentrated our funds on electronic resources such as the Philosopher's Index, JSTOR, and several other comprehensive databases in the Humanities. Roughly two dozen journals in philosophy are available in print, and access to hundreds of electronic journals is available online. The University library holdings include almost 19,000 volumes in philosophy and religion, and the library also provides funds each year to be used to acquire new books for their collection based on our recommendations. In fact, the funds available for PAR were increased in 2009-10 because our books – and especially those in religious studies -- are also widely used by other disciplines.

The PAR department is hamstrung by the fact that we have only a single administrative staff member and this person only works half-time. In fact, the department has had a half-time administrative assistant since the days when it included only three full-time and one part-time faculty members; the department now includes six full-time faculty, one full-time instructor and four part-time faculty members, and yet it still has only the single half-time administrative assistant. The number of administrative reports for which this person is responsible, of course, is not halved. The stress on the staff member is a serious concern. But with only half support, most projects (like this Program Review) take twice as long as they otherwise would, and some projects (like the departmental website) get perpetually postponed.

Executive Summary

The Philosophy and Religion department at WCU is robust. The department added two tenure track faculty in 2005. The department grew from an Associated Area into a department in the fall of 2007. In 2008, it added two more full-time faculty members. The number of majors has consistently grown in this time period, and the department now graduates roughly ten students each year. In 2009, the faculty updated and strengthened the concentration in religion. In 2010, we revised our curriculum, in line with the WCU's Quality Enhancement Plan to increase our student's intentional learning.

We believe that the PAR department effectively serves both the university and its students. Our curriculum readies students, both majors and non-majors, for meaningful work, community, and leadership. Our administrative structure is appropriate to meet the department's current and future needs. Our faculty is composed of a gifted group of teacher-scholars. We have only three areas of concern. First, the concentration in religion has grown to the point that two-thirds of the PAR majors concentrate in religion, but at present those courses are primarily taught by non-tenure track faculty. As the department grows, we will need to add a tenure-

track position in religion so that that concentration is not an afterthought but is adequately represented by the permanent faculty of the university. We also see that hire as an opportunity to address the lack of diversity in the department. Second, the possibility that PAR may lose the relatively small amount of funding to convert the environmental ethics position to tenure track means that the department may lose the member who best epitomizes the school's commitment to interdisciplinary teaching, stewardship of the environment, and student engagement. And third, the department only has a single administrative assistant and she is only employed in the department part-time; the limited staff support is a serious source of concern. In other respects, the department is adequately funded.

The faculty members of the Philosophy and Religion department appreciate this opportunity to share our plans and successes with our peers. We would like to thank the reviewers for their time and effort, and welcome any comments or suggestions that they may have for improving our department.