

Department of Philosophy and Religion

College of Arts and Sciences
Western Carolina University

Self-Study for 2015-2016 Program Review

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Executive Summary

Philosophy and Religion is still a relatively young department at Western Carolina University. Our first alumni, who completed Special Studies degrees in philosophy, graduated in the early 1980's. Under the leadership of our Emeritus Professor Mike Jones (recently deceased), a Bachelor of Arts program in philosophy was created that produced its first majors a decade later. Our concentration in religion debuted in 2005, and what had been the "Associated Areas of Philosophy and Religion" within the College of Arts and Sciences was upgraded to full department status in academic year 2007-'08.

In a very real sense, then, most of the history of Philosophy and Religion at WCU has been dedicated not primarily to producing majors in our program, but to serving the broader needs of the College and University through its Liberal Studies (general education) Program. And to a large degree, that remains the way the program views itself, even in face of the substantial growth in majors we have seen in the last decade. As this is primarily a review of our Bachelor of Arts *program*, we concentrate most of our attention in this self-study there, but it bears keeping in mind throughout, that the department views its role and function within the University substantially more broadly than that. Our service to Liberal Studies and other institutional programs (including Environmental Science, International Studies, and Art) remains a substantive part of our self-understanding.

With respect to philosophy and religion programs at our UNC sister schools, we are a small program that nevertheless graduates a high number of students relative to faculty size. Our departmental identity, as expressed in our mission statement and strategic plan, is centered on two primary areas: 1) issues of ethical and sociopolitical thought, and 2) issues at the intersection of philosophy and religion, where all of our tenure-line faculty have both interests and scholarly background. This distinctive focus has enabled us to contribute heavily to the College and University mission of a "community-engaged" institution through our individual faculty commitments and collective work with students, as well as our collaborations with other campus units. We were recognized for the extensiveness of this work last year when we were awarded the WCU Center for Service Learning's departmental Leading Light Award.

We have made significant progress on most areas of our departmental strategic plan over the last three years, including a substantial curriculum revision, significant outreach to our alumni, and renewed focus on recruiting and retention. This has resulted in significant growth in our alumni (major and minor) populations over the past 5-10 years. In our aspiration to be both rigorous and highly supportive inside and outside our classrooms, we have taken a number of community-building steps in the last decade. The resulting intentionally-fostered community of students and faculty is cited routinely by graduating seniors as the most significant aspect of the program, demonstrating not just its intrinsic importance, but also instrumental value in supporting recruiting and retention.

Our faculty are committed scholars, recognized leaders in their profession and the institution, and accomplished teachers. Our pedagogical excellence has been recognized, both individually (via college and university awards) and collectively (via our long-term participation in teaching Honors courses) over the years. More recently, we have made a point of relying on a number of other AAC&U High-Impact Educational Practices where they are most appropriate in our curriculum. Our reliance on undergraduate research, for instance, in our sophomore and junior-senior seminars and in our capstone course has provided an opportunity for many of our students to hone their research to a point where it has been accepted and presented at the National Conference for Undergraduate Research. The quality of this work, in turn, has enabled recent graduates to go on to a number of different graduate and professional schools, as well as to find meaningful work opportunities in vocations personally fulfilling to them (both of which we recently began tracking).

While we currently have sufficient faculty resources to meet program and university demand, we believe significant further increase to the university student population (which is expected) would necessitate the need for an additional full-time faculty hire – at least at Instructor level, if not tenure-line, due to our diminishing ability to attract additional quality adjunct faculty – in order to maintain appropriate pedagogical practices. Another pressing challenge is the continuing compression of faculty salaries due to lack of significant legislative pay increases over the past seven years. Although the University has initiated a staged market adjustment plan, several of our faculty remain a significant distance from “market” compensation. Paired with the loss of summer revenue-sharing monies, this means that our faculty are shouldering an increasing proportion of their own scholarly travel, and in some cases refraining from going to conferences at which they could present their work. This is not a healthy situation for individual faculty or the department.

While we view our program as both strong and growing, we recognize internally several areas for improvement. First, though our alumni base has grown tremendously in the last 10 and even 5 years, we would be happy to hear concrete suggestions for further increasing our number of majors. Second, we would welcome any insights into further increasing diversity among both our faculty and student populations. Third, in the absence of further full-time hires, we could readily put to use advice on expanding our part-time faculty pool to help fill anticipated university demand. Finally, while we have worked on assessment and the integration of data from senior exit interviews, surveys, capstone projects and our signature “meaning” assignments into curricular improvement, we would appreciate input on further quality assessment protocols to strengthen our curriculum, without compromising the importance of less easily assessable goals such as the building of dispositions like intellectual humility and empathy. We look forward to the feedback of our review team on these and other areas that will strengthen our program.

Standard 1. The purpose of the program reflects and supports the mission and strategic vision of Western Carolina University and the mission of its School and/or College.

In keeping with our understanding of our place in the university, our departmental mission statement conceives the department as a place “to foster an engaged community with the moral and intellectual skills necessary for meaningful work, community, and leadership” that is “open to all members of the student body and in service to the wider community.” It is only in the final sentence of our mission statement that we note that, “for those students who choose to specialize in this area, the department offers a Bachelor of Arts degree with concentrations in either philosophy or religion.” This dovetails with the College of Arts and Sciences’ [mission](#) to provide “students with a liberal arts foundation where they are taught to think critically, grow academically, and communicate effectively,” while also preparing them to be “intellectually, socially, culturally, and professionally engaged citizens and leaders”; as well as the mission and vision of the University to engage in programs and activities that improve individual lives as a national model of a [regionally engaged university](#).

The primary way we serve these purposes is by fostering in our classes and co-curricular activities [all five of the core academic skills](#) WCU is committed to ensuring its graduates possess in its *2020 Vision* (Goal 1.2). Our departmental strategic plan, however, identifies one of these five – helping individuals to clarify and act on their purpose and values – as our explicit and hallmark task, and to this end we focus a great deal of our energies on ethical and sociopolitical issues and their history. That goal, alongside the fact that our program features faculty members all of whom have at least some interests at the intersection of philosophy and religious studies (considered broadly as including the history of philosophy, religions, and philosophical theology), we would identify as the two most distinctive aspects of our program. It is a credit to prior planning and departmental collegiality that the department’s identity, which faculty uniformly buy into, aligns so neatly with its primary strengths.

On the philosophy side of our curriculum, we are pluralistic and focus on value theory broadly, with a particular commitment to ethics and social theory in particular. On the religion side, we have a commitment to comparative work, though we have traditionally had more strengths in the textual and philosophical, and in Western religious traditions generally, as a function of the history of our program. Our weaknesses are largely a function of our concerted approach to our strengths. On the philosophy side, we do somewhat less work on analytic or Anglo-American philosophy, as well as metaphysical and epistemological issues, than most undergraduate philosophy programs. On the religion side, we have traditionally taken more of a humanities-based and less of a social scientific approach than is common today, though our newest faculty member has added ethnographic/field experience that has allowed us to diversify this approach.

Among our UNC sister institutions, we would distinguish four different sizes of philosophy and/or religion programs: i) Chapel Hill, which grants the PhD in Philosophy and in Religion; ii) six mid-sized programs with roughly 15-25 full-time faculty members total between philosophy and religious studies; iii) three smaller

programs with 6-10 full-time faculty; and iv) six programs without a major in or department of philosophy or religion.¹ Our quantitative niche (with six tenure-line faculty) is squarely in that third category, though our number of graduates compares quite favorably with several of our mid-size sister schools in category ii, as well.

Our departmental focus on ethical and social theory, both on the philosophy and religion side of the curriculum, has also presented an opportunity for the department to foster significant engaged learning among our students, which is a key part of the University's mission and vision as a [Carnegie Engaged Institution](#). To that end, the department has for over a decade sponsored an undergraduate journal of satire and social criticism, *The Gadfly*;² and we have also worked with a number of other units on campus – including the [Center for Service Learning](#) (CSL), [Intercultural Affairs](#) (ICA), the [Fine Art Museum](#), and the [Honors College](#) – particularly over the past five years, to create a number of engaged-learning opportunities for our students inside and outside of classes. Our longest-standing (multi-decade) collaboration is with the Honors College, with which we sponsor the [Jerry Jackson Lectures in the Humanities](#), bringing to campus 4 or 5 lay-friendly lectures from philosophers, scholars of religion, or others in the humanities each year, as part of our department's overall visiting scholar series, which represents an opportunity for students to explore multiple points of view through informed discourse (2020 Vision Initiative 2.2.6). More recently, we have worked extensively with Intercultural Affairs on a number of projects, including the 2013 visit of [monks from the Drepung Loseling Monastery](#); an outdoor showing of the documentary film [Girl Rising](#) in 2014 that was open to the public; ICA's January [Social Justice Institute](#), to which multiple faculty members in the department have contributed their expertise; and a fall 2015 event on child marriage for the International Day of the Girl. The Fine Art Museum is an emerging partner: to this point, we have been able to link shows and lectures there to a number of our classes, but given our departmental support of the B.A. and B.F.A. in Art (see standard 4), we see great potential for increased collaboration there.

Finally, the Center for Service Learning has been an invaluable ally for us in developing the high-impact practice of service learning and helping us serve the University's Carnegie Engagement mission in multiple department courses (more on which in standard 3). The Center recently recognized the value of our work with civic engagement inside and outside the classroom with their highest honor, the departmental Leading Light Award in 2015. CSL Director Lane Perry said of our educational work in bridging the clarification of values with civic engagement, that the department “invests in a strategic and intentional alignment of engagement with the practices and study of Philosophy and Religion course curricula... through provocative questions, community-engaged experience, and reflection.” Then, rather than engaging in “armchair activism” or theoretical reflection on ethical and sociopolitical activity alone, the department attempts “to grapple with and directly engage the

¹ Category ii) would include Charlotte, NC State, Appalachian State, Wilmington, Greensboro, and East Carolina; iii) includes WCU, Asheville and Pembroke; and iv) includes Fayetteville State, Winston-Salem State, A&T, Central, Elizabeth City, and the School of the Arts.

² Back issues are available in the department office.

questions they ask in the classroom with the challenges living in our community, region, and world.” We do this via our community-engaged coursework (see standard 3), but also via our individual faculty commitments, which we value and reward as service via our collegial review document. For instance, our bioethicist has previously served as a member of the Ethics Boards at Mission Hospitals in Asheville and (currently) at Harris Regional Hospital in Sylva; our environmental philosopher has engaged himself and others on issues of regional significance such as generating public comment for the US Forest Service; and our current department head is the President-Elect of the Rotary club of Asheville-Biltmore and the regional chair of the CARE Action Network. All of these organizational commitments tie faculty expertise in areas of ethical and social theory to concrete civic engagement, and all are essential to tying the departmental mission to the University’s goal to strengthen relationships with external partners (2020 Vision Goal 3.1).

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

Our departmental strategic plan and statement of departmental initiatives was constructed in committee during 2012-2013, in response to the University’s 2020 Vision, and then approved by the department as a whole. The department head provides occasional updates to the department on these initiatives, with longer discussions of particular initiatives when necessary. During the past three years, we have made substantial progress in working towards the goals laid out in that plan, maintaining our distinctive departmental areas of focus, increasing faculty diversity, and applying for substantial intramural funding. We have worked with a number of collaborators to create significant development opportunities for students outside of class, built out our pre-professional programs (and now have a significantly higher number of pre-law students), have engaged, over the last year, in a substantial revision of our curriculum that is still in process, and have also revised specific course offerings for pre-seminary students. We are currently working with program alumni on plans to establish our department’s first endowed “Cornerstone” scholarship. Our recruiting and retention efforts have also been extensive, and many departments have commented on or modeled their own literature on our new publicity materials in the last couple years. We have continued our outreach to the community through local organizations and agencies as well as a couple [op-eds](#). And we have significantly improved our contact with our alumni. As we move into the second half of the period addressed by our plan, we plan to conclude our current curriculum revision process, focus even more intensely on increasing our major numbers and faculty and student diversity, expand our development activities, and seriously consider hosting a conference on engagement in philosophy and religious studies.

The other ongoing planning and assessment activities the department conducts are tied more directly to program curriculum. After the most recent SACS reaffirmation, the department integrated its assessment more tightly with the university Quality Enhancement Plan, focusing on synthesis. We have utilized both an exit survey and extensive (around 30 minutes each) exit interviews with all of our seniors to gather data on how we might improve the program.³ This data is reviewed by an assessment committee in the following academic year for

³ Departmental notes are available upon request.

purposes of strengthening the program curriculum. Our assessment committee has also routinely reviewed a selection of a series of assignments in the 100-level, sophomore seminar, and capstone course to measure overall student engagement in their thinking about their own lives and vocations, in addition to their ability to construct and effectively communicate their own argumentative positions. We also utilized for a couple of years a separate faculty evaluation of students in the sophomore seminar and capstone. However, our assessment committee determined last year that we were not getting good enough data from this last assessment method to determine concrete ways to improve the program, and has recommended discontinuing this practice and establishing other methods of assessing student learning outcomes. This conversation is ongoing at present within our department, and we would welcome input from our review team on alternative, quality assessment protocols moving forward.

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

In 2014-'15 the department spent a substantial amount of time revising our program student learning outcomes for our B.A. concentrations in philosophy and religion and began a process of revising our curriculum to map those outcomes. The changes we have made have included streamlining our learning outcomes and curriculum, and adding an explicit outcome geared towards clarifying and acting on individual values, which we have been doing (and assessing) successfully in many of our classes for several years, but had never included as an explicit program outcome. A review of exit surveys and interviews along with other student materials by our assessment committee, led to these decisions as a way to better serve our own majors' needs, and we are sending them through the curriculum approval channels in stages this year. Although there are no accrediting bodies for philosophy or religion, and given our particular departmental foci, we view our revised curricula as lying well within the professional norms of the disciplines.

Our curricula in both concentrations (both the current and proposed versions) proceed from a set of introductory and core courses in the history of philosophy or religions, logic, or method and theory, together with our sophomore seminar; through a set of guided electives chosen in consultation with the student's advisor, to required seminar and capstone courses. We expect that by the end of their time in the major, students in both concentrations will be able to construct and persuasively argue for their own positions, integrating the habits, skills, methods, and concrete understanding of philosophical and religious traditions they have developed in previous courses with us. We also hope that they will have further developed important *dispositions* such as humility, openness, empathy, and self- and social criticism that are both central to the study of philosophy and religion, and which tend to result in the pursuit of lifelong learning, though this is a much harder goal to assess even within the context of a senior exit interview. Since the major is fairly compact, requiring only 30 hours plus a language through the intermediate (231-232) level, our majors also have the opportunity to complete a second major; since 2009, our students have double majored in 14 other programs on campus: the most popular of these

have been History, English, and International Studies. It is also the case that some students take courses with us in the Liberal Studies program and then elect to minor or even pick up a second major with us quite late.

Because almost all of our major courses (nearly thirty currently in our rotation) double for credit within the [Liberal Studies \(WCU general education\) program](#), we serve far more non-majors than we do majors. Our program made the decision many years ago that it would be better for students inside and outside the major alike to offer a wide range of classes in Liberal Studies, rather than offering only a very limited number. In that way we have been able to appeal broadly to different student interests, and have also been able to fill classes we would never have been able to offer if they were open to majors alone. The learning outcomes of these classes feed into both our program student learning outcomes as well as those for the Liberal Studies program, where our courses are currently placed in the Humanities, History, Social Sciences, and World Cultures “Perspectives” categories. Our historical approach, together with our emphasis on ethical and social issues and the clarification of one’s own values that results from studying texts and traditions very different from one’s own, has meant that we are able to contribute productively to all of these areas. As part of our curriculum revision in the last two years, however, we have decided to re-focus our offerings within just the Humanities and World Cultures perspectives, where we feel we can generate the most impact on the overall curriculum; we will be submitting those changes through the rest of this year as we revise the student learning outcomes for the courses.

A major consequence of our decision to offer most of our upper-level courses within the Liberal Studies program, however, is that these courses cannot be offered with prerequisites. So, we have devised a number of different strategies for our courses to serve majors and non-majors simultaneously, including additional learning opportunities for majors inside or outside their classes (via supplemental majors-only meetings); the option to elect a different, more rigorous set of course requirements for majors, minors, and other interested parties (such as honors students); and exams and other assignments that offer majors the chance to make and demonstrate connections between classes and ideas that other students are not in a position to do, but also need not do in order to perform well in the class. We also decided, as part of our curriculum revision process last year, to increase the required seminar hours in the major from 3 to 6 in order to address concerns majors have raised in the past about not having enough courses limited primarily to majors and minors.

Within our courses, we utilize a wide range of AAC&U [High-Impact Educational Practices](#). Our sophomore and junior/senior seminar courses are premised on significant *undergraduate research*; numerous students in these classes, as well as others, have had abstracts for their undergraduate research projects accepted to the National Conference for Undergraduate Research. Several of our other courses are *writing-intensive*, as well; and faculty have utilized the services of [WCU Writing Fellows](#) to assist students in becoming better written communicators by the end of the semester. All majors enroll in PAR 495 for a *capstone experience*, which involves either sitting the junior/senior seminar course available that semester with a different, more research-intensive set of requirements, or else working one-on-one with an individual faculty member on a traditional 30-

page senior thesis. Many of our courses are explicitly designated as *diversity-focused or global learning* courses within the Liberal Studies program at WCU, and our newest faculty member is particularly committed to offering courses in this area.

As noted above, several of our faculty have committed to *service learning and community-based learning*. Lane Perry, the Director of the Center for Service Learning noted, in awarding our department the Leading Light Award last year, that “over the past 5 years, curricular examples include PAR354 – Religion, Suffering, and the Moral Imagination has engaged over 150 students with dozens of partners within the community.” This course has also included, since 2011, the opportunity for a limited number of students to attend a conference and citizen advocacy event in Washington, D.C. with the international, non-partisan and non-sectarian humanitarian organization [CARE](#). Perry also noted that “PAR333 – Environmental Ethics has engaged students as advocates and activists at mountaintop removal sites in the region, the Whipple Company Store, EPA hearings, Appalachian Rising conference and lobbying in DC, and a wilderness experience designed to contextualize course material.” He concluded that as a result of this kind of curricular work, “PAR is inspiring a wave of thoughtful citizens.” More recently, other faculty have included a range of community-engaged learning experiences such as the production of short radio spots on the understanding of love in pop songs for our “Philosophy of Love and Sex” class, and a trip to a Taoist center for a workshop on Taoist philosophy in the context of our “Philosophies of China” course. The departmental club (PaRC) also organizes events, such as participation in [Stoic Week](#). All of these experiences contribute to WCU initiatives to increase “leadership and experiential opportunities” and to enhance civic engagement (*2020 Vision Initiative 2.1.5 and 2.2.4*).

Finally, but perhaps most importantly, we would like to stress the rigorous yet supportive nature of our program, courses, and faculty generally. We adhere to and promote high academic standards (*2020 Vision Initiatives 2.1.1 and 2.1.2*), but we also work very hard to provide an environment that is supportive enough for students to meet those standards. Both inside and outside our classes, we prize faculty/student interaction, and consciously attempt to facilitate the community among and between faculty and students. Our valuing of this is probably the most common and consistent comment we receive in our senior exit surveys and interviews. Our lounge has helped facilitate the camaraderie of the students and faculty in the program tremendously over the past five years, as have the high-impact practices in which we engage in our classes, but we really owe most of it to the caring nature of our faculty generally. Our students tell us that they perceive their faculty are genuinely concerned about them not just as students, but as persons, and the connections that we build with them thereby are crucial to the *esprit de corps* we have self-consciously tried to build over the last two decades.

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

The department currently has one tenure-track Assistant Professor and five tenured faculty members (including one full Professor and four Associates), all of whom possess a [Ph.D.](#) Of these, four are trained chiefly in philosophy, while two are trained in religious studies. This approximately matches the current percentage of

students in the philosophy vs. religion concentrations, although the latter ratio has fluctuated a bit over time. However, both religious studies faculty have substantial background in philosophy; and all four philosophers have scholarly interests or training in the history or philosophy of religion, theology, or associated areas, so there is a good deal of intersection of interests among the faculty. This year, our full Professor is on scholarly leave, and we were able to retain the services of a long-term (decade plus) adjunct faculty member as an Instructor. This has allowed us to provide stability of instruction during the year. In addition, we currently rely on a couple of other long-term adjuncts (including our Administrative Support Associate) for one class per semester or year; and we have had cause, due to increasing university enrolments, also to engage a couple additional adjuncts over the last 2-3 years. All tenure-line faculty, save for the department head, teach three three-hour courses per semester; the department head teaches two.

All faculty undergo an annual faculty evaluation process that focuses on teaching, scholarship, and service. We evaluate each other's teaching on a rotating peer-review basis, with the department head and one other faculty member observing each member of the department in the classroom and evaluating a selection of their teaching materials, every year. Productive and collegial feedback is generated in this way for each faculty member, who also produces a brief narrative reflecting on their teaching in that year. We also undergo a standard student assessment of instruction (SAI) based on instruments approved by the Faculty Senate for each class we teach. Departmental SAI data show that full-time faculty in the department are evaluated quite positively by students. For instance, in fall 2014-spring 2015, 35 of 39 sections taught by full-time faculty or long-term adjuncts received overall student evaluations of 3.3 or higher on a 1-4 point Likert scale; 21 of 39 were 3.6 or higher. Our faculty have also won (Excellence in Teaching Liberal Studies; Honors College "Rodin Award" for mentoring) or been finalists for (Chancellor's Distinguished Teaching Award; College of Arts and Sciences Teaching Award; Last Lecture Award) all save one of the most prestigious university teaching awards.

As [seen in our vitae](#), our faculty continue – as clearly required by our departmental collegial review document – to be actively engaged in scholarship as well as service to the profession, with all faculty generally presenting work in a conference environment at least once a year, and several presenting in multiple venues. Although our Full Professor is our only faculty member with sole-authored volumes (two), both he and our newest tenure-line faculty member have co-edited volumes, and all tenured faculty have multiple peer reviewed essays in reputable journals or edited collections, which is required for earning tenure and promotion to Associate Professor within the department.

In terms of service, senior faculty have also served as President of numerous professional organizations, including the NC Philosophical Society and the NC Religious Studies Association. Further, because our departmental ethos has involved a deep investment in the overall life of the institution, our faculty have been involved in shared governance at an exceptionally high rate. Every tenured member of our department has served or is currently serving on the WCU Faculty Senate. And, though our size entails that we must make strategic

choices, we have also been highly successful in placing our faculty members on a variety of high-profile College and University-level committees. For instance, one of our faculty members chaired the university-wide learning theme on poverty in 2011-12, another served on the General Education review that resulted in WCU's current Liberal Studies program, and a third chaired the subcommittee on undergraduate programs for a previous SACS Re-accreditation.

The department has attempted to increase the diversity of its faculty for several years now, but given limited hiring opportunities, we have not been as successful as we would like. We currently have one female tenure-track faculty member, along with two female part-time faculty members. We have no current faculty members identifying as persons of color. For a variety of reasons, including the modeling of both women and persons of color as professionals within the disciplines of philosophy and religious studies to students from underrepresented groups, we are committed to continuing our attempts to add more diversity to our faculty in future years and would gratefully receive reviewer feedback on additional strategies to achieve this goal.

Because most of our major courses double as Liberal Studies courses, we (along with almost all programs teaching in the Liberal Studies program) have seen significant increases in the size of our courses over the past decade, peaking and then slightly declining this year. In 2005, most of our classes were capped at 25 students; we gradually increased all of those save seminars, online, and honors courses (capped at 21-25) to 38, and virtually all of these fill to within a few seats of capacity. This was concurrent with the doubling of our tenure-line faculty to meet increasing demand over the past decade, meaning that our departmental student credit hour production is quite high. With WCU's plateauing enrolment this year, we were able to reduce most of our caps to a more manageable 33. We hope to be able to continue to hold the sizes of our classes at or close to that more pedagogically-appropriate number going forward. In addition, tenured members of the faculty regularly mentor 30-page capstone senior theses with students as overloads, meaning that teaching loads are sometimes significantly greater than they appear on paper.

Beyond our substantial presence in the Liberal Studies program, our faculty are engaged in service to a number of other programs on campus. Our environmental philosopher offers courses in Environmental Ethics and American Wilderness Ethics and Aesthetics that serve the Environmental Science (ES) program; he also serves on the Environmental Science Program Council. We also offer a section of Philosophy of Art every semester, as this is a required core course in the B.A. in Art, as well as the B.F.A. in Art (both for the Studio Emphasis and the Graphic Design Emphasis). Because the study of the environment and the creative arts are two of WCU's six designated curricular focus areas (*2020 Vision* Initiative 1.1.2), these are particularly significant. However, we also support other programs in various ways. For instance, our Global Justice course supports the International Studies major, and the faculty member who teaches that course also frequently offers visiting lectures in ethics to other professional programs on campus such as Engineering.

Our permanent and part-time faculty are, in our judgment, sufficient to meet our current needs and adequately support both the Liberal Studies program and the other programs for which we teach service courses. However, if WCU enrolment spikes again (as expected), it will be difficult to maintain current pedagogical practices and not compromise instructional integrity without adding additional faculty. Given the difficulty of attracting new, highly-qualified part-time faculty members to the department, we would therefore likely need an additional full-time hire to fill those needs. Because this individual would primarily be supporting general education, an Instructor line might be sufficient, although of course a tenure-stream line would be preferable for recruiting the best possible candidates to Cullowhee.

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

According to our records, we have graduated approximately 165 majors and a roughly equal number of minors in the entire history of our program, from a few Special Studies in Philosophy majors in the 1980's, through the earliest days of the B.A. program in Philosophy in the 1990's, to the present. The program has seen a couple of substantial increases in size in that time period, and we have experienced rapid growth in the last decade, having graduated roughly 2/3 of our entire alumni base (112 majors) since 2005. In fact, since only our last program review in AY 2010-'11, we have graduated 66 majors, or just over 13 per year. This is equivalent to a full 40% of our alumni graduating in the last half decade. While the 18 majors we produced last year was a record for us, we would expect to return to something closer to our historical trend line of 10-12 graduates the next couple years based on current enrolments. This size major population enables us to provide significant faculty-student interaction, as we noted above. We highlight these numbers to demonstrate that our overall trajectory is one of significant growth, but in a time of resource scarcity where even quality programs must also justify themselves in terms of their number of graduates, we would welcome any insights into further growing our major numbers to reach or exceed our departmental strategic plan's target of 25% growth (in majors or graduates) by 2020.

The primary way that we recruit majors and minors is through our classes, but we have also expended considerable effort in advertising in the past three years, creating entirely new marketing tri-folds for our major concentrations in philosophy and religion, as well as standalone half-page sheets designed to attract pre-professional students who would benefit from training in philosophy or religious studies prior to attendance at law, medical, or divinity schools.

Given the small size of our cohort of majors, it is difficult to make retention comparisons to other programs, but we can say that we track every student who comes into the program, placing each with the most appropriate advisor following an initial meeting with the department head. The department head and/or faculty advisor also follows up with all students who are not retained in the program regarding their decision to change majors or leave the university. These conversations have shown that lack of retention in our program generally has more to do with financial issues and other personal life crises than any other factors.

The students who remain in the program until graduation, however, as noted above, uniformly cite the departmental community as its defining attribute. In exit interviews conducted with all majors upon completion of program requirements, many describe finding an *esprit de corps* in our department that they did not have in previous majors, and it is not uncommon for students to express this openly and emotionally in their exit interviews. A few simple things have contributed to this community. First, several years ago we converted our department office space largely into a lounge. In doing this, we opened up a space – literally and metaphorically – for the students to take ownership within the department, and the PAR lounge is indeed used as a gathering space for informal discussion and relaxation almost every day, by students and faculty alike. Second, every week we formalize this space by hosting a “Sweet Wednesday,” where one faculty member brings in some manner of cake, cookies, etc. This serves to let students know that there is one day in particular during the week when they are likely to be able to meet and get to know other majors and minors. Third, this community is an inclusive one. The demographic data demonstrates a roughly gradually increasing diversity in our program’s student population, alongside a more substantial increase in female students. As with all philosophy programs, we know that we could be doing better in our recruitment of underrepresented groups, but we have already attempted to increase our diversity and inclusivity by taking a number of concrete steps. Five of seven full-time members of the department have undertaken WCU Safe Zone training on particular issues faced by LGBT students, and multiple students have commented that they appreciated our proactive move on that front. One faculty member attended a conference at Chapel Hill on recruiting and retaining undergraduate women in philosophy, and another served on the steering committee for the first WCU Women’s Leadership Conference last year. And, while we have not yet been successful in placing one of our students, we have also sponsored applications from our majors to attend the [Penn State PIKSI program](#) and UC San Diego’s [summer program for women in philosophy](#). More informally, a group of students – primarily women – met in our lounge for what they christened “Feminist Fibercraft Fridays.” These kinds of activities have served to let all of our students know that they can come to us with any issues or problems they might have, and that we will treat them as persons worthy of respect at all times and offer additional support in times of crisis. Finally, the inclusivity of our program is demonstrated in the fact that many minors consider us a second academic home, and we consider them part of our community, as well. We believe we can fairly say that few academic majors have the kind of relationship with their minors that we do. While there is certainly an element of strategy involved here – as we often recruit majors from the ranks of our current minors as well – we have also made a deliberate attempt to foster this sense of community among all our majors and minors for its own sake, as well as their own.

The quality of the students we thus attract and retain is demonstrated in a variety of ways. First, they are incredibly active in undergraduate research. In the last three years alone, we have had 17 papers from students in our classes - primarily though not exclusively majors and minors – accepted to the National Conference for Undergraduate Research. While WCU has played an active role at this conference over the past 10 years, our

small department has, in many years, been one of the institutional leaders in sponsoring undergraduate research there. While the mentorship of our faculty is certainly important in this regard, the choice of our students to spend extra time engaging in research of high enough quality – both internal and external to class requirements – is no less significant. And it is also of course the case that our students’ engagement in this high-impact practice of undergraduate research, as well as the other practices discussed above (see standard 3), better enable us to retain the quality students we do recruit.

Our collaboration with the Honors College extends beyond the Jerry Jackson Lectures mentioned above, and has been mutually beneficial. We currently teach two honors courses per semester, having codified this number (roughly our historical average over the past five+ years) beginning in spring 2013. From spring 2013 through spring 2016, we will have offered 14 honors sections, or 13% of all honors sections (n=108) taught in the University in those seven semesters. The fact that our courses remain in strong demand by the best students at WCU speaks to the high quality of our teaching; but teaching a high number of honors courses also allows us to recruit excellent students into our major, and we have had significant success in doing so over the years.

The strength of our students is also demonstrated in the range of graduate and professional schools they have been accepted to and matriculated at over the past few years, as well as the careers they have gone directly into. We have only recently begun to track this formally, given the growth of our program. In fall 2014 we created a “Friends of WCU PAR” [LinkedIn page](#) and sent out our first departmental newsletter, *PARsnips*; this fall volume two went out. We have also created an Alumni Vocational Talks series twice a year (on advising days) that brings in alumni to discuss how the skills they built in our major have served them in their life and career. These three tactics have already enabled us to pair current students with alumni in similar fields for advanced mentoring, and we anticipate that they will also serve to help us in developing resources to support future students and program activities.

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

Given the small size and exceptional collegiality of our department faculty, the department has traditionally operated as a committee of the whole for most important decision-making processes, including strategic planning, hiring of new full-time faculty, and curriculum development. In the past couple years, however, we have begun to move toward a model of doing more of our work (e.g. on curricular revision, assessment, and hiring of an Instructor for this academic year) in smaller, 2-3 person committees with membership appointed by the department head, who normally serves as chair. This has allowed us to complete our work a bit more efficiently, while maintaining overall departmental oversight of these processes. We meet monthly during the academic year, and are able, in most matters, to operate on the basis of consensus.

The department continues to utilize all tenured faculty for tenure, promotion, and post-tenure review processes. The department head is evaluated annually on teaching, scholarship, and service, by a departmental

committee; and on program leadership by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. Departmental faculty input is also solicited via an annual institutional survey; however, due to the small size of our department, this data is not readily available for the Dean's department head evaluation, so some alternative evaluation methods are needed here.

Because we offer a single B.A., and because of the structure and history of our religion curriculum (as an outgrowth of the philosophy degree program), we operate with a department head as sole administrator and see no compelling reason at this time to designate an additional program director for the religion concentration. In terms of training and support, the current DH (since January 2013) and Administrative Support Associate were selected as members of the inaugural (12 person) cohort of the WCU Leadership Academy in AY 2013-'14, which provided both useful professional development and networking opportunities. The Arts and Sciences Department Heads Council, which is tasked with supporting and improving the College and generally meets biweekly through the academic year, also provides some formal and informal professional development opportunities. In addition, all WCU department heads participate in roughly three to five department head workshops each year for professional development purposes. The current DH has also been able to rely upon the expertise of two former department heads who remain in the department, for guidance and support.

As noted above, we have involved current students in decision-making processes by utilizing data and opinions gathered from senior exit surveys and interviews with virtually every graduating senior over the past three years, to strengthen and improve our curriculum in various ways. Members of our departmental club and other students have also provided valuable insight into other processes, such as the hiring of our newest tenure-track faculty member. We have not – largely as a function of the relative youth of our program and alumni base – relied on program alumni for internal decision-making. However, having now created a LinkedIn group for alumni majors and minors of the program (with roughly 55 members, rapidly approaching 20% of our entire major/minor alumni base) as well as establishing and publishing the first two volumes of our annual departmental newsletter *PARsnips*, we hope to have put in place resources that will allow us to involve alumni in some relevant departmental decision-making as well as development in the future.

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

The primary resource pool for the department is faculty salaries, which have – due to severe cuts in the UNC system budget over the past few years – remained relatively stagnant since 2008.⁴ The constellation of these factors means that there has been significant salary compression and – because new faculty can be hired at market rates – even inversion among faculty members university-wide, particularly for those hired after 2008; and our department is no exception. As noted above, it is also the case that resource constraints have forced us to raise course caps substantially beyond past practice, which entails an increased teaching workload, and therefore a decrease in scholarly activity or service, or at minimum a shift in pedagogical practices to less direct faculty

⁴ 2008 was the last year in which significant raises were awarded. Further, promotion raises have remained unchanged for over a decade: \$2000 is awarded to base salary for promotion to Associate and \$3000 for promotion to Full Professor.

feedback. Despite these resource issues, we have only lost one tenure-line faculty member since 2010,⁵ and at this point believe the department's full-time needs are largely being met by the faculty cohort we have.

With respect to part-time faculty, our need to offer more courses in the fall semesters to meet University demand have been met with supplemental funding allocated by the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Studies and the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. Because nearly all our courses double for Liberal Studies credit, this fulfills College and University as well as departmental needs. However, we do appear to be reaching the limits of our available part-time pool. Last year our department head sent personal inquiries to department heads and graduate program directors at all philosophy and religious studies Ph.D. programs within a multi-hour radius of WCU, and only turned up a couple of part-time faculty options that we considered strong enough to put in front of our classes. As the department prides itself on providing a rigorous yet supportive environment, and also because we recruit heavily from our Liberal Studies classes, hiring an adjunct faculty member in whom we are less than confident would be entirely counterproductive, so any guidance our reviewers could provide us in increasing our part-time faculty pool would be appreciated.

Aside from ordinary supplies and publicity materials, the department's primary operating budget expenditures each year are on faculty scholarly travel and student experiential learning. We have allocated substantial funding over the past several years to faculty in order to allow them to present work at professional conferences on a national and international level;⁶ however, we have also funded a number of recurring student service-learning experiences such as the CARE national conference and West Virginia mountaintop coal removal site trip, as we view these high-impact experiences – and the reflections and learning they inspire – as incredibly enriching for our students. Additionally, last year, due to cost overruns, the Honors College was unable to cover the full costs for students to attend and present papers at the National Conference for Undergraduate Research (which it has traditionally covered at close to 100%). Knowing this was likely to be the case far enough in advance, we were able to carve out \$100 each for our majors traveling to NCUR to help cover their excess costs for this important experience.

Over the past five years, the department has experienced a radical swing in financial resources, largely due to the impact of college- and university-level decisions responding to state budget cuts. While our state funding allocation had remained fairly constant for several years,⁷ our department had also been benefiting substantially from a revenue-sharing model that returned a great deal of funding to PAR based on the net revenues

⁵ Our previous department head was hired externally in 2008 and returned to faculty status in 2013. The next year, he received an offer to serve as chair at one of our UNC sister schools, at a raise of over \$20,000 beyond what he had been making as DH here.

⁶ We generally begin with an assumption of roughly \$350-450 per faculty member per year, but are communitarian in our allocation of that funding, erring on the side of enhancing the professional development of our junior colleagues.

⁷ State funding for AY 2011-'12 = \$5,826; 2012-'13 = \$5,826

generated by the department during summer session.⁸ Our summer revenue, in fact, amounted to over 60% of our overall discretionary budget from 2011-'13. Three years ago, however, the Arts and Sciences Department Heads Council chose, as the least bad option available, to cover the last round of state budget cuts by moving a portion of recurring costs into summer revenue sharing. This, unfortunately, consumed a great deal of revenue that would otherwise have been returned to our department, and represented a sizeable diminution in our operating funds.⁹ In proportional terms, then, we took the equivalent of roughly a 50% cut to our operating budget in 2013-'14.

In order to deal with this funding loss, the department has taken a number of steps to generate other (largely internal) funding for faculty members.¹⁰ We currently require faculty members to apply for the \$1200 in Chancellor's Travel Funds available to all faculty annually, for any regional, national, or international conferences at which they may be presenting. With the advent of the new Professional Development Grants from the Provost's office, we have also been very successful in tapping into a second source of funding (up to \$1200 per grant; and prior to this year, up to two grants per year) for faculty travel, as well.¹¹ We are also indebted to the Dean of Arts and Sciences, who last year reallocated \$3000 within the College in order to rectify a longstanding inequity in our department's state allocation: this additional funding has helped cushion the loss of summer funding somewhat. In addition, the department negotiated a recurring budget line of \$2000 from Undergraduate Studies for use for attendance at the CARE conference¹²; and, as noted above, we have worked a great deal with other offices (particularly Intercultural Affairs and the Center for Service Learning) on campus in sponsoring events, and have thus been able to leverage additional intramural funding. Finally, we have for many years taken advantage of the university's competitively-awarded Visiting Scholar funds to help bring in one or more scholars during the academic year who require more than a nominal honorarium or expenses. Despite this additional funding, however, and due to the fact that our faculty are so active in their disciplines, our internal calculations show that our tenure-line faculty still went substantially out-of-pocket for their scholarly travel in the past two years.¹³

In terms of non-state funding, the department currently has no scholarship or other endowment funds. We have, however, over the past year and a half, begun to lay the groundwork for development through the establishment of our LinkedIn group and the publication of the first two volumes of our departmental newsletter, as mentioned above. This year, the department has been working with the development officer for Arts and

⁸ Summer funding for AY 2011-'12 = \$10,121; 2012-13 = \$8,742

⁹ In AY 2013-'14 we received only \$2,050 in summer funds, and \$2,306 in 2014-'15.

¹⁰ We have not in the past applied for external funding such as the Wabash, but our newest tenure-track faculty member has indicated her interest in potentially applying for external monies.

¹¹ In AY 2013-'14 we brought in a total of \$11,389.82 in CTF and PDG funding; in 2014-'15 we brought in another \$7,690.34.

¹² The Honors College and Center for Service Learning have also contributed to this trip in the past.

¹³ To the tune of \$5,351.72 total in 2013-'14 and another \$3,095.04 last year

Sciences on developing a long-term plan that makes sense for PAR within the context of the University's capital campaign. Our top development priorities, consistent with WCU's stated priority of increasing scholarship support for our students (*2020 Vision* Initiatives 1.6.4 and 6.3.6) and investing in our people (*2020 Vision* Goal 4.4), are the endowment of a Cornerstone scholarship in the department and unrestricted gifts to enable robust student learning experiences (whether service-learning, undergraduate research or other opportunities) and faculty scholarly travel.

One final source of funding the current department head has strongly encouraged faculty to apply for is WCU's (competitive) scholarly development leave, in order to make certain that they have sufficient time and resources to devote to their scholarship – whether they are pursuing a single line of research in more depth, or opening up a new line. Faculty may apply as early as their sixth year for one semester assignment at full pay, or a full year at half pay. We have been very happy with our success in accessing this extremely competitive source of funding: one faculty member received scholarly leave last fall; a second is on leave this year; and a third has just been granted scholarly leave for spring 2017. The other two currently-eligible members of the department plan to apply in the next couple years.

Library holdings – journals, monographs, anthologies, and reference materials – were last reviewed several years ago, and have generally been more than adequate for our teaching needs. We have access to Philosopher's Index, JSTOR, and a number of other comprehensive databases, a couple dozen journals in print, and hundreds more electronically. Library staff have also worked extensively with us in the past on making sure we acquire texts relevant to the courses we are teaching. When our scholarly needs have exceeded what we can reasonably purchase, they have also been excellent at helping us acquire what we need on a temporary basis through Inter-Library Loan. Although we have not generally needed advanced software, our newest faculty member has expressed an interest in some more robust information processing systems.

Finally, allow us to note that our administrative support is exemplary. In the wake of our last program review, our administrative support associate (ASA) was upgraded from half-time to full-time, which was crucial in supporting our department's growth. We are also extremely lucky to have an ASA who has work experience relevant to our disciplines, and who has been critical in facilitating student ownership of our departmental office-cum-lounge; this in turn has been absolutely essential to the communal spirit we have built in our program over the past few years. She has been extremely effective not only in conducting administrative work on her own, but has also been able to bring in and mentor multiple student workers who are able to handle some of the more routine clerical tasks of an academic department. Most significantly, she has been a trusted advisor for three previous department heads, and continues to serve in this role for the current department head. Last year, one of our primary goals was to submit paperwork justifying 're-banding' and thereby acquiring a significant raise for her, in light of the work she has done for us over the past decade.