

# External Review Report of the Religion, Culture and Society Program

October 2024

## External Review Committee

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## Executive Summary

The University of Victoria's Religion, Culture and Society (RCS) Program is a dynamic and robust program that is highly interdisciplinary, with an appropriate complement of core courses, enriched by numerous cross-listed courses and electives drawn from across the Humanities, Social Sciences and even the Science Faculty. The core faculty comprise a group of five active and dedicated teachers and scholars, housed in diverse units but joined in their passion and commitment to the academic study and teaching of religion as it impacts and is expressed in human culture, both historically and today.

RCS provides a nourishing and collegial working environment (3.1), and is supported by a highly competent administrative staff person. In addition, RCS has a unique and powerful resource to support its academic mission in the [Centre for Studies in Religion and Society \(CSRS\)](#). This is the premier Canadian centre dedicated to research in the academic study of religion, and it affords students and faculty on-going access to cutting edge research and researchers in the field of Religious Studies. In this way the CSRS offers RCS students unequalled opportunities for appreciating the academic study of religion.

Finally, the RCS program provides stellar and diverse programming options at a relatively low cost, and helps the university meet its strategic plan goals of offering interdisciplinary approaches that foster partnerships and collaborations between faculties and academic units and the community. Through fostering appreciation and understanding of the cultural and societal dimensions of the diverse forms of human religiosity, the program also contributes to UVic's Strategic Plan and its recognition that "diverse knowledge systems are essential in finding solutions to the challenges facing society and the planet." Moreover, at a time when religious nationalism is on the rise globally, the importance of undergraduate education about the nature, history and cultural impact of religion should be apparent.

This is an important moment for the program given the CSRS's Director's return to full-time teaching, and the likelihood that the .25 faculty cross-appointment between RCS and Anthropology will be made permanent. In order to take advantage of this moment and better support and improve RCS in its mission, we have the following recommendations:

## **Summary of Recommendations**

1. Regularize faculty member's .25 position and ideally expand it to a 1.0 research stream position.

2. Add a partial or full-time appointment in Indigenous cultural/religious/spiritual traditions when possible.
3. Provide a collective meeting space for RCS students and faculty in Clearihue and, if possible, cluster RCS core faculty members' offices near this space.
4. Consider the distinctive needs and benefits of interdisciplinary programs in the University's upcoming budget by ensuring that enrolments in all RCS courses and cross-listed courses are recognized.
5. Build on and expand the existing relationship between RCS and the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society, e.g., through sitting on each other's boards/program committee, integrating Centre speakers into RCS syllabi, having closer faculty involvement with the Centre, and highlighting the connection between RCS and the CSRS in promotional materials and information about the RCS program.
6. Alternate the RCS capstone course with another seminar, such as a field school, that can also fulfil this curricular requirement. Having such an option will increase the chances that students will be able to graduate in a timely fashion even if the capstone course is not offered in their graduating year.
7. Create a thematic first-year course on an engaging topic that will attract large numbers of students e.g. religion and music; cults and new religious movements; love and sexuality; religion and popular culture, or evil.
8. Set in place a means to keep in touch with alumni to provide data to show the long-term value and impact that RCS has had on its students.
9. Pursue the development of a certificate in "Experiencing Religion, Culture and Society."
10. Develop RCS's field school ideas and explore potential sources of funding for them, as part of expanding experiential learning options in general.
11. Engage in a curriculum mapping exercise of the program to ensure students have a means to deepen their knowledge of the discipline as well as gain breadth.
12. Explore and make RCS students aware of scriptural language study options through distance learning or summer study offerings, if necessary from other institutions.