

Committee Report – Review of Religious and Spiritual Life Fall 2016

Review Committee:

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Religious and Spiritual Life (RSL), which is housed within Student Life, at the University of the Pacific, presented an extremely thorough self-study of their program. They used the program assessment standards developed by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) to assess and give ratings over 12 categories. The external review committee reviewed the self study document and then met together to discuss reactions to the report, overview of RSL's purpose and goals and to determine findings from the external committee.

This report is a summary of the main findings from the individual reviews and group discussion. First, staff of RSL is to be commended for their willingness to review and rate themselves with an openness to possible shortcomings. Overall, however, the committee agreed that the self-study was too conservative in its self-ratings on the various criterion measures at the end of each review section. It is the conclusion of the external committee that RSL meets or exceeds most all standards other than those specifically addressed below.

We were excited by the variety and number of scheduled functions through RSL. They are to be especially commended for the visual appeal of their advertising. Several

members of the committee from outside the university were somewhat jealous of the invitations and posters to advertise RSL functions. These activities seem clearly targeted at the mission, vision, and values of RSL. We hope there is continued effort to effectively advertise functions to the University and broader community.

The Dean of Religious and Spiritual Life and other staff have impressive resumes and are well suited for their assigned roles. They have established and continue to maintain important relationships across the University and with the community. RSL is uniquely positioned to help facilitate important dialogue on religious and spiritual issues as they impact and play out in the public sphere. Their collaborations with community organizations also give them unique opportunity to further the University's goal to "serve our communities . . . through . . . outreach activities" (Strategic plan 1.5).

RSL works with multiple affiliate organizations to help meet student needs across varied religious, spiritual and cultural backgrounds. They express through the self-study a desire to have greater help in meeting the religious and spiritual interests in Eastern Religions. We agree with this desire and note its importance in keeping with the Mission, Vision, and Values of RSL. We recommend that avenues for improving outreach and expertise within Eastern Religions be pursued, and financially supported, as merited.

Recommendation: Create and implement a plan for how to best accomplish outreach and expertise in Eastern Religions.

One point that will need further clarification as it becomes a more broadly discussed issue across the nation's campuses is the delicate balance between diversity/inclusion policies and ability to maintain positive, beneficial affiliate agreements with multiple religious organizations with varied values and backgrounds. One of the confounding and

difficult issues here is that to exclude any religious group from participation due to concerns with inclusion would in itself be a non-inclusive policy. These issues are complicated and require ongoing study and collaboration to find meaningful and workable solutions. While RSL has thus far managed well the relationships with affiliate organizations, there is beginning a more national conversation on the impact of diversity and inclusion policies on the affiliate status of some religious groups.

Recommendation: *Continue to monitor and work through the difficult issues related to affiliate agreements, inclusion policies and possible conflicts with religious groups of varying beliefs.*

We note, through our review a number of facilities issues for RSL. First, their office and designated spaces are not ADA accessible. This significantly limits their ability to serve the broader University community. It is our understanding that the lack of ADA accessibility has prevented in recent years greater participation with Freshman Orientation. Students used to come through the RSL space during Freshman Orientation, but the lack of ADA compliant facilities has caused that to not be possible. This lack of access decreases ability to engage students from their initial arrival on campus. The RSL office and program space is in need of renovation and the need for this connects back to the University's intent for RSL. Should renovations be considered and put into action, or should alternative opportunities for use of space be more strongly considered.

The University of the Pacific is blessed with the beautiful Morris Chapel, a historically meaningful and currently beautiful place of worship and meeting. The Christian place of worship meets well the needs of the largest group of students expressing religious affiliation, but is not an appropriate or useful space for several other groups. RSL

and the broader university community need to continue to explore how to cherish and make excellent use of the Morris Chapel while pursuing alternative sacred space for other groups on campus. RSL is currently collaborating with Student Life to create multi-use sacred space within the to be constructed residence halls and we applaud them for seeking innovative and effective means for accomplishing these goals. It is clear, though that a more comprehensive, long-term plan to create dedicated, versatile, and accessible space for RSL to accomplish their important work is needed.

Recommendation: *Plan for and accomplish the creation of campus sacred space and offices for RSL that are accessible by and for all students.*

A big picture concern and, in our estimation, the most important issue that came from our discussion is the need for greater clarification from University administration on the role and intent for RSL. The self-report reviews the mission, vision and values of RSL as well as student life. In our review, however, we felt that there is a lack of clarity from University Administration about the role and intent of RSL, especially as it relates to the strategic plan. We see areas where RSL could play a key role in the strategic plan (e.g. 1.5, 2.4, 3.2, 3.3, & 4.2), but we lacked clarity on the specifics of how university administrators view RSL and its purpose. As we reflected on multiple issues within our discussion, such as appropriate space, engaging the broader university and surrounding communities, available funding, etc. we found ourselves coming back to the question of University goals and intent for RSL. We feel that RSL's mission, vision, and goals, can be much enhanced from further clarification on RSL's connection to and core participation in the overall strategic plan.

Recommendation: Clarification from University administration on the intent and role for RSL as well as its connection to and core participation in the Strategic Plan (Pacific 2020/2025)

RSL is positioned to be quite innovative in its ability to build collaborations within the university as well as to connect the University to the broader community in meaningful and powerful ways. Religious and spiritual concerns are often at the core of societal concerns in ways that both benefit and harm. RSL can assist students, faculty, and staff in more effectively addressing such concerns and improving dialogue about these issues as well as connecting to the broader community on such issues of import. Better leveraging these opportunities, however, is dependent on further clarification and direction from the University administration on the role and intent of Religious and Spiritual Life as well as its connection to the broader university strategic plan.

Summary of Key Recommendations:

1. Clarification from University administration on the intent and role for RSL as well as its connection to and core participation in the Strategic Plan (Pacific 2020/2025)
2. Plan for and accomplish the creation of campus sacred space and offices for RSL that are accessible by and for all students.
3. Create and implement a plan for how to best accomplish outreach and expertise in Eastern Religions.
4. Continue to monitor and work through the difficult issues related to affiliate agreements, inclusion policies and possible conflicts with religious groups of varying beliefs.