

**Report of the Academic Unit Review Committee
Department of Gender, Religion, and Critical Studies
University of Regina**

August 2024

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Executive Summary

The external review team conducted an on-site visit of the Department of Gender, Religion, and Critical Studies on April 12 and 15, 2024. During the site visit, we met with members of the University of Regina's and the federated colleges' senior administration, representatives from various University service units, Department members, as well as undergraduate and graduate students (see the full list in 1. below). In addition to reading the Department's Self-Study Report prior to the site visit, we also reviewed Department members' curriculum vitae and selected course outlines, enrollment and student declaration data, and course calendar information for the Women's and Gender Studies (WGST) and the Religious Studies (SLST) programs.

The Department of Gender, Religion, and Critical Studies was created in 2019, with the administrative merger of the Department of Women's and Gender Studies and the Department of Religious Studies. As noted in the Self-Study Report, the union was meant "to promote efficiencies and complementarities between the two Departments" (p. 1). Some of the identified benefits of the merger included appointing one Department Head for both programs; sharing administrative staff; and enhancing teaching capacity. The external review team learned that the Critical Studies in the name of the Department is meant to signal a focus on the critical studies of gender and religion and to create an opening should other programs wish to join the unit in the future. In its current form, the Department attends to five cornerstone activities that make for a viable academic unit with potential for further growth and development: high quality scholarly research with very strong faculty publication records; deep commitment to undergraduate teaching (servicing honours students, majors, minors, and especially students across the University); contributions to graduate training in the Faculty of Arts; a demonstrated and strong commitment to collegial governance and collaborative working environment among faculty members across two former Departments; and very impressive university, professional, and community service.

This Academic Unit Review Report will consider both the strengths of the Department and identify some of the challenges it is facing. While the external review team is very cognizant of the budget constrained environment in the Faculty of Arts, our recommendations are meant to provide suggestions for Department members to consider as they continue to grapple with questions about the unit's identity and future directions; possible opportunities for new academic programming, strategies to foster growth in enrollments and declared undergraduate students, and key goals and priorities for the next three to five years.

1. Outline of Site Visit¹

During the two-day site visit on April 12 and 15, 2024, the external review team had meetings with the following individuals and groups:

¹ We would especially like to thank Yvonne Gray and Kristina Eckel, Executive Assistants, Office of the Associate Vice President Academic for their work in organizing our site visit.

- Dr. Isabelle Dostaler, VP Academic and Provost, University of Regina
- Dr. Christopher Yost, VP Research, University of Regina
- Dr. Nilgün Önder, AVP Academic, University of Regina
- Lori Campbell, AVP Indigenous Engagement, University of Regina
- Dr. Aziz Douai, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Regina
- Dr. Shannon Dea, Dean, Faculty of Arts, University of Regina
- Dr. Tobias Sperlich, Associate Dean Undergraduate, Faculty of Arts, University of Regina
- Dr. Sami Helewa, President and Associate Professor, Religious Studies, Campion College
- Dr. Claire Carter, Head, Gender, Religion, and Critical Studies, University of Regina
- Dr. Kevin Bond, Acting Head in 2024-2025, Gender, Religion, and Critical Studies
- Dr. Randal Rogers, Graduate Coordinator, Gender, Religion, and Critical Studies
- Dr. William Arnal, Professor, Gender, Religion, and Critical Studies
- Dr. Michelle Stewart, Professor, Gender, Religion, and Critical Studies, Interim Associate Dean Student Success, Faculty of Arts, University of Regina
- Kyuhoon Cho and Danette Starblanket, sessional instructors, Gender, Religion, and Critical Studies; and a sessional instructor who teaches WGST 100 in the satellite Social Work and Nursing programs in Saskatoon
- Five undergraduate students, Gender, Religion, and Critical Studies
- Four graduate students, Gender, Religion, and Critical Studies
- John Bird, Manager, ta-tawâw Student Centre, University of Regina (included a tour of the Student Centre)
- Michael Shires, Librarian, Archer Library, University of Regina
- Robert Thomas, Librarian, Archer Library, University of Regina
- Kevin Bolan, Director, Student Success, University of Regina
- Colleen Walsh, Manager UR International Student Services and Global Learning Centre, University of Regina
- Cassandra Loustel, International Student Engagement Coordinator, UR International Student Services and Global Learning Centre, University of Regina

After the site visit was concluded, the external review team met with the Dr. Yvonne Petry, Dean, Luther College and Dr. Tom Phenix, Dean, Campion College on Zoom on April 22, 2024.

2. Preamble

This Academic Unit Review Report will consider both the strengths of the Department and identify some of the challenges it is facing. While the external review team is very cognizant of the budget constraints in the Faculty of Arts, our recommendations are meant to provide suggestions for the members of a relatively new Department to consider. It should be noted that the Department was created not long before the COVID-19 hit and diverted administrative and faculty attention to navigating the pandemic for over two years. Some key departmental considerations include continuing to grapple with questions about the unit's identity and future

directions; the realities of faculty resource constraints; possible opportunities for new interdisciplinary academic programming, including at the graduate level; strategies to foster growth in enrollments and declared undergraduate students; and key goals and priorities for the next three to five years.

3. University's and Faculty's Visions, Missions, Goals, and Priorities

In its 2020-2025 document, entitled *All My Relations*, the University of Regina identified its commitment to five areas of focus: discovery (the development and transmission of new knowledge that arises from active learning with a goal of all students participating in experiential learning opportunities); Truth and Reconciliation; well-being and belonging (with a goal of assessing adopting, implementing, and improving student thriving metrics); environment and climate action (and the reduction of the University's ecological footprint); and impact and identity (with the goal of measuring and improving the University's positive social, environmental, economic, and health impacts through reciprocal relationships with communities).

In its 2023-2026 Academic Plan, entitled *Go Far, Together*, the University of Regina identified two strategic commitments: Truth and Reconciliation; and equity, diversity, and inclusion. Key areas of focus are student recruitment and retention, including the development of a University-wide strategic enrollment plan; teaching and learning, including recognizing and supporting the deep commitment of faculty members to impactful teaching, learning, and supervision; academic programming that is accessible, flexible, pedagogically effective, innovative, and relevant to students; and enhanced student success and experience, including student advising and student services.

The Faculty of Arts' *Vision and Directions Towards 2025* document identifies the Faculty's priorities, including: truth, reconciliation, and transformation; climate and environmental justice; supportive and flexible credential options; experiential learning and from learning to transformative change; interdisciplinary graduate programs; and inclusive and collaborative communities.

In reviewing online and other materials provided, the external review team encountered several different iterations of the Women's and Gender Studies' and Religious Studies' program descriptions. For example, the Gender, Religion, and Critical Studies website states that the Women's and Gender Studies program enables students to pursue interdisciplinary studies that focus on gender, women's issues, and women's diverse experiences. A separate document the external reviewer team received from the Department Head, which included WGST's learning outcomes and program mapping, included a more up-to-date and intersectional program description: Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Regina "offers students an opportunity to examine society and social structures, including health, politics, education, popular cultures and representation, and religions, focusing on understanding inequities, marginalization, and issues around social power and social capital. Classes will examine key

concepts and the interconnections between social injustice, in particular those experienced by women, trans and queer people, and BIPOC groups. The Program is grounded in commitments, classroom practices, research, mentoring and public service in the areas including but not limited to anti-racist, decolonizing, (dis)ability, activism and social justice, and gender and sexual diversity. Students in this program will take a range of classes, including experiential learning and community engagement. Students can take classes that will contribute to a certificate in queer, trans, and gender studies. Instructors will facilitate safer spaces for inclusive learning and community building. We commit to this in our classes and to seek such across campus and community. Students who complete a degree in Women's and Gender Studies will carry key skills such as research, writing, public speaking, and analysis skills needed to work in healthcare, justice, human services, nonprofit, education and public policy sectors."

The Gender, Religion, and Critical Studies Department website states that the Religious Studies program offers "courses on a variety of religious traditions, on current issues, and on academic approaches to religious phenomena. The essential goal of these courses is to offer students the opportunity to critically examine the realm of the religious in its varied manifestations and to illuminate some of the ways people have addressed perennial issues about life and human destiny ... The student of religious studies at the University of Regina not only learns to read and think critically but also acquires research skills that facilitate the study and appreciation of diverse cultures. Past students have used this global perspective, and the tools acquired in the study of religion as background for careers in law, journalism, government, social work, education, medicine, business, and religious institutions." Another document, which includes the Religious Studies learning outcomes and program mapping, provides, in our estimation, a refreshed version of its mandate: "Religion, for better or worse, has an impact on nearly every sphere of human existence, from the distant past to the global future, from everyday matters like dress and diet to lofty and encompassing issues like gender, sexuality, politics, economics, and deep conceptions of human meaning; from the bodily and material to the abstract; from the deeply traditional to the wildly creative. The essential goal of the academic study of religion is to offer students the opportunity to examine religious behaviour critically and thought in its varied manifestations and to illuminate some of the ways religious concerns have and will intersect with human activities. Religious Studies courses are not designed to foster personal religious commitment or to evaluate the relative merits of various religious practices, traditions, and points of view. Past students have used this critical global perspective, and the tools acquired in the study of religion as background for careers in law, journalism, government, social work, education, medicine, business, and religious institutions."

Based on a review of these program descriptions, the program-specific learning outcomes contained in the Self-Study Report (pages 10-11), and selected course outlines, there are clear departmental synergies with the University's and Faculty's visions, missions, goals and priorities as articulated in the above documents. These include a demonstrated commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion; truth and reconciliation; impactful teaching, learning, and supervision and experiential learning; and academic programming that is accessible and relevant to

students. In the latter case, in the context of current global uncertainties and political polarizations, gender and religion are hotly contested. The Department offers students the opportunity to critically engage with and gain fluency in multicultural and diverse religious cultures in a global context; critically engage with gender, settler colonial, racialized, and other intersectional power structures that shape people's experiences; and in the process, develop critical, analytical, research, communication, equity, and community-building skills.

Despite the above-mentioned synergies, **the external review team recommends that the Department update its website, especially with an eye to revising and updating the Women's and Gender Studies and Religious Studies program descriptions (this work has already been completed as versions of the program descriptions can be found in the program mapping documents or in the undergraduate calendar). The program descriptions should be outward facing and focus on student recruitment and retention. The Department might also consider developing a joint program description or mission statement that focuses on, for example, the importance of the critical and interdisciplinary studies of gender and religion from intersectional and multicultural lenses and what Gender, Religion, and Critical Studies can offer both undergraduate and graduate students (Recommendation #1).**

4. Faculty and Staff Complement and Working Environment

a. Faculty Complement

The Gender, Religion, and Critical Studies Department has a faculty complement of 7 FTE (3.5 FTE in each program) with one Women's and Gender Studies faculty member seconded into an administrative position in the Dean's Office (the secondment has not been backfilled) and one Religious Studies faculty member who is the President of Campion College. There is one faculty member (Anderson) who is cross appointed in Women's and Gender Studies and Religious Studies, providing an important interdisciplinary bridge between the two programs. As noted in the Self-Study Report, faculty transfers into the Women's and Gender Studies program have enabled WGST to incorporate new and critical areas of focus, including settler colonialism and justice, reproductive justice, visual culture, masculinity studies, queer and trans studies, and research methodologies.

At the same time, the external review team heard concerns about not having sufficient resources to hire sessional instructors to fulfill course needs, such as covering sabbatical leaves or reduced teaching due to service and research commitments. Some sessional courses are funded by the Centre for Continuing Education if the classes are offered online, in the evenings, or in the spring/summer term (see 6. Financial Resources below). During the site visit, the external review team met with three former and current sessional instructors. One sessional instructor started teaching in WGST in 2017 but now teaches WGST 100 in the satellite Social Work and Nursing programs in Saskatoon, an important WGST service teaching contribution to two University of Regina professional programs. After being appointed to another position at the University of Regina, another sessional instructor is no longer able to teach WGST 207:

Indigenous Feminisms or WGST 280: Indigenous Masculinities in Canada, which is a significant loss to the Women's and Gender Studies course offerings. Finally, a third sessional instructor indicated that he had experienced a drastic reduction in his teaching allocation in Religious Studies due to budgetary constraints.

In addition, Department (and federated college) members expressed concerns about future retirements and what effect they will have on the unit's ability to fulfill its program offerings if faculty members are not replaced. At the same time, the Department Head did express a strong desire to hire a faculty member in the field of Indigenous feminisms and spirituality which could serve as a bridge between the two programs and contribute to the Faculty of Arts' work towards truth, reconciliation, and transformation. One complexity that was mentioned was how the new Indigenous faculty member would interface with First Nations University and whether their courses would be (jointly?) offered there, something that will need to be considered should the faculty hire move forward.

When the budget in the Faculty of Arts permits, the external review team strongly supports allocating one faculty line to the Department of Gender, Religion, and Critical Studies to enhance its faculty complement and teaching capacity and to foster interdisciplinarity by serving as a bridge between the two programs. The area of specialization would be determined by the Department members in consultation with the Dean of the Faculty of Arts (Recommendation # 2).

b. Staff Complement

The Department has one administrative assistant: Bettyann Paterson. The External Review team did not have an opportunity to meet with her; however, we did not hear any concerns expressed about deficiencies in administrative support for the Department Head or faculty and sessional lecturers in the Department. In fact, Dr. Claire Carter, the Department Head, expressed great satisfaction at the level of support she received.

c. Working Environment

The external reviewers were especially impressed with the highly collegial and supportive environment in the Department, especially considering the relatively recent integration of two Departments in 2019. There also appeared to be a collaborative working relationship with the federated colleges (for example, in academic integration, program planning, course scheduling, etc.). However, given that the federated colleges have autonomous administrative structures and budgets, it was noted that engaging in long term strategic planning with the federated colleges might raise some complexities that will need to be considered and, if possible, addressed during such a process.

5. Faculty Research and Service

The external review team was provided with the curriculum vitas of seven faculty members (four in Religious Studies and three in Women's and Gender Studies). This information was

supplemented by information provided in the Self-Study Report and via online research profiles. Faculty research in both Women's and Gender Studies and Religious Studies covers a range of relevant subject areas (see Self-Study Report, pp. 5-6). Overall, Gender, Religion, and Critical Studies is a very active unit in the areas of research and scholarship. Faculty members' scholarly production is very strong; for example, over the last ten years, they have collectively published 17 books, 50 refereed journal articles, 27 books chapters, and 15 technical reports; they have also delivered 129 conference presentations (see Self Study Report, pp.7-8). Four faculty members' scholarly work has been supported by external research grants (e.g. SSHRC Insight, SSHRC IDG, CIHR, Public Safety Canada, etc.).

As mentioned in the Self-Study Report, both Women's and Gender Studies and Religious Studies engage in a significant amount of service teaching at the University. In addition to Women's and Gender Studies contributions to the satellite Social Work and Nursing programs in Saskatoon (see 4.a. above), between 66% and 71% of students taught in WGST are from outside the Faculty of Arts and between 55% and 63% of students taught in RLST are from outside the Faculty. In reviewing the curriculum vitae, it is also very evident that faculty members in the Department have done and continue to do an impressive amount of University- and Faculty-level service (for example, Faculty Association committee work; Faculty of Arts Performance Review Committees; EDI Taskforce, etc.). Dr. Carter received merit for outstanding service in equity, diversity, and inclusion in 2021. Given the small size of the Department, faculty members have also taken on a noteworthy number of administrative positions (for example, Interim Associate Dean Student Success in the Faculty of Arts) and are very active in professional and community service. In our meeting with the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Dr. Dea noted that Gender, Religion, and Critical Studies is "overpopulated with excellent, active, and in-demand university citizens."

6. Financial Resources

As noted in the Self-Study Report, the Department budget covers the following expenses: sessional stipends, teaching assistant salaries, and operating expenses (such as printing, supplies, advertising, food, etc.). As discussed above, the sessional stipend as well as the teaching assistant budgets have been negatively impacted by financial/budgetary constraints. Limits to the sessional budget has created challenges for the Department in meeting their program and course needs (see 4.a. above). At the same time, the Self-Study Report suggests that the administrative merger of Women's and Gender Studies and Religious Studies has allowed the Department to become somewhat more financially viable by sharing some unit-level expenses and supports.

7. Undergraduate Programs

a. Student Learning Needs and Experiences

The external review team met with a group of five undergraduate students who had declared an honours, major, or minor degree program in Women's and Gender Studies and/or Religious

Studies. When asked how they discovered one or both programs and decided to pursue a degree in WGST or RLST, most indicated that they took a course (e.g. RLST 100, WGST 100, or the very popular RLST 201: Ghosts, Monsters, and Demons) and got hooked. While a very small student sample, their responses do suggest the importance of 100- and 200-level courses in student recruitment and retention.

In addition, the students we met with were generally very positive about both programs. For example, they maintained that WGST and RLST are highly relevant fields of study, in that they both explore critical and pressing societal issues (e.g., colonialism, intersectionality, white supremacy, gender, multiculturalism, diverse religious traditions in a globalized world, etc.) and foster the development of various key skills, including critical thinking. The students also maintained that both programs attract students from all over the University and hence classroom dialogues can be very exciting. Finally, the students spoke very highly of faculty members in the Department and praised them for their commitment to excellence in teaching and to unwavering student support and success.

The undergraduate students we met with did, however, identify some challenges in both programs, some of which were also mentioned in the Self-Study Report. With reference to WGST, the students pointed to the difficulty registering in WGST courses above the 100 level, which meant they had to seek approval before being allowed to register (even if they had the prerequisites). As one student noted, “This, in my opinion, may be causing significant issues for others attempting to access WGST classes. I view this area as an important one to review as class sizes are already considerably small as others may not want to go through the multiple steps to register for a class” (Self-Study Report, p. 19). Another student emphasized that “The obstacles that registrants have to jump through to register for classes absolutely discourages enrollment period when classes are then cancelled due to low enrollments, especially when so few classes are offered to begin with. It is frustrating for students but affects instructors and their own academic journeys as well” (Self-Study Report, p. 20). We also heard at meetings with faculty members during the site visit that the cancelling of upper-level classes due to low enrollments did have a very negative effect on morale.

While the external review team did not delve into the WGST registration issue, it is certainly one that the Department Head or the Dean of the Faculty of Arts should raise with the relevant unit on campus. To ensure that students have easy access to WGST 200-, 300-, and 400-level courses, this registration problem should be corrected in the Gateway system as soon as possible (Recommendation #3).

The WGST students also mentioned the decrease in course offerings and course options at the 300 and especially the 400 levels. One student noted that “There are fewer 400 classes offered which makes it difficult for students who are majoring in Women’s and Gender Studies.” One student needed another 400-level course to complete their degree requirements, but the same 400-level course was being offered again, which jeopardized their time to degree completion. Some students were also frustrated with the approved electives list, in that not all the courses

were offered and some had prerequisites. They did, however, emphasize that Dr. Carter, the Department Head, was very helpful in approving electives.

In Religious Studies, the students mentioned the lack of Indigenous courses or courses on contemporary Christianity and Judaism in the program. They also noted some scheduling issues (e.g. Religious Studies courses that were offered at the same time at the Regina campus and federated colleges campuses).

Finally, the students from both programs did not find that WGST and RLST were very integrated along interdisciplinary lines.

Besides some programmatic issues, the students also offered some additional suggestions that they felt would strengthen the programs and the external review team recommends that the Department consider them:

- **Information sessions about the honours program and graduate school for current undergraduate students (Recommendation #4).**
- **Faculty recruitment initiatives in high schools for both programs (lectures, recruitment events, etc.) (Recommendation #5).**
- **Increased visibility of the Department on campus through marketing and promotion, a social media campaign, etc. with a focus on what the unit has to offer undergraduate students (course offerings, why major/minor in WGST and RLST, etc.) (Recommendation #6).**

b. Women's and Gender Studies Programs

i. Degree Programs

The Women's and Gender Studies program offers the following degree programs: Honours in Women's and Gender Studies; Major in Women's and Gender Studies; Minor in Women's and Gender Studies; and a new Certificate in Queer, Trans, and Gender Studies. **Unfortunately, the external review team was not able to find any mention of the Queer, Trans, and Gender Studies Certificate on the Department website. Profiling and advertising this important option should be part of the Department's website updating and marketing/promotion initiatives (Recommendation #7).**

Importantly, the Women's and Gender Studies program has an undergraduate student association, which is crucial to creating a sense of community among declared WGST students. When it comes to enhancing the visibility of the WGST program on campus, in high schools, and in the community, declared undergraduate students can also be recruited and act as important ambassadors for the program. The Women's and Gender Studies program also has a close and significant relationship with the Women's Centre and, in most years, has held collaborative events with the Centre.

ii. Enrollment Patterns

The external review team was provided with enrollment and declared student data as part of the package of materials to review. However, none of the materials identified specific departmental enrollment or declared student targets at the undergraduate level. What the data revealed is that between 2018-2019 and 2022-2023, overall annual undergraduate enrollments in Women's and Gender Studies remained fairly steady, fluctuating between 1100 and 1300 students. At the 100 level, WGST enrollments were very strong, attracting about 800 students per year in that five-year period. At the 200 level, course enrollments continued to be respectable, with most courses attracting between 30 and 75 students and enrollments increasing from 215 students in 2018-2019 to 350 students in 2022-2023. However, a decline in course enrollments was noticeable at the 300 level and especially at the 400 level. (If courses do not reach a minimum enrollment of 15 students, they are subject to cancellation, which can create issues for declared students as noted above.) The Self-Study Report pointed out that "Courses that were offered online or as hybrid/hyflex had steady/consistent enrollment ... " (p. 12).

In addition, the number of declared WGST students also remained steady. The honours program is very small, but the number of first majors over the last ten years fluctuated between 10 and 19 students and the number of minors increased from a low of 3 students in the fall of 2015 to a high of 15 students in the fall of 2022. **In addition to developing strategies (for example, a marketing and promotional campaign) that focus on the benefits of majoring in WGST program or double majoring in WGST and another program, the external review team recommends that the WGST program members also focus on promoting the benefits of minor in WGST as a useful complement to selected majors (Recommendation #8).**

iii. Program Architecture

As per the 2024-2025 University undergraduate calendar, each of the degree programs in WGST demands that students complete a specified number of required WGST courses, select a specific number of courses from WGST course options, and complete further courses from the WGST approved elective list. The reliance on a mixture of required WGST courses, other WGST courses, and elective courses taught in other units is not uncommon in Women's and Gender Studies programs in Canada and particularly those with limited faculty resources. Students are also required to complete BA breadth requirements, along with whatever other courses are needed to complete the overall degree and/or the requirements in a second major.

All students enrolled as Women's and Gender Studies honours students, majors, and minors must complete WGST 100: Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies, WGST 200: Feminisms: Feminist Theories and Knowledge; and WGST 220: The Practice of Feminist Research: Power and Inequality or WGST 372: Gender: Theories and Practices. WGST 100 appears to be a prerequisite for most if not all WGST undergraduate courses.

In reviewing the WGST program architecture, the external review team discussed some suggestions for revision for the WGST program members to consider. First, the WGST program

members should review course prerequisites (for example, WGST 100 as a prerequisite for most WGST courses) and consider whether they create a structural barrier to students entering and completing the WGST degree programs. Certainly, the required WGST courses for honours students, majors, and minors should have prerequisites, but are they needed for all WGST courses? Second, the WGST program members should also discuss whether the required feminist theory course (WGST 200) and one of the required research methodologies courses (WGST 220) are positioned appropriately at the 200-level. Should they, for example, be moved to the 300 or the 400 level? In some Women's and Gender Studies programs, the program architecture looks something like this:

- WGST 100 as the foundational and recruitment course for future honours students, majors, and minors and the prerequisite for required WGST courses for declared students only.
- WGST 200-level courses are treated as a possible second entry point for students into the program. Courses at this level are particularly attractive so that students continue in the program from the 100 level (retention) or discover and enter the program at the 200 level (recruitment). 200-level WGST courses have no prerequisites.
- After building a cohort at the 100 and 200 levels, the WGST required theory course is positioned at the 300 level (with a WGST 100 level prerequisite). The question to consider is whether all 300-level WGST courses need prerequisites as some students discover Women's and Gender Studies by taking an exciting 300-level WGST course.
- The required research methodologies course is positioned at the 300 or even the 400 level (with a WGST 100 level prerequisite).

The WGST program members might also consider mounting a 400-level capstone course (3 credits) where majors and even minors produce a graduating independent research or creative project, a model that has been highly successful in other Women's and Gender Studies programs. This 400-level capstone could include RLST majors and provide WGST and RLST majors and minors an opportunity for interdisciplinary engagement as well as focused research and/or experiential/applied work.

The external review team recommends that the WGST program members conduct a rigorous review of the WGST program, including the program architecture, prerequisites, and course offerings and titles with a focus on recruitment and retention at the 100, 200, and 300 levels, introducing declared students to theories and research methodologies at the 300 level, and possibly mounting a capstone course for declared WGST (and RLST) students at the 400 level (Recommendation #9).

c. Religious Studies Programs

i. Degree Programs

The Religious Studies program offers the following undergraduate degree programs: Honours in Religious Studies; Major in Religious Studies; and Minor in Religious Studies.

Importantly, Religious Studies has a dynamic speakers series and, like Women's and Gender Studies, has an active undergraduate student society that meets regularly and holds events once per term. The student society members and especially majors could also be recruited to serve as ambassadors for the program, especially as it relates to program visibility as well as student recruitment and retention.

ii. Enrollment Patterns

The external review team received undergraduate student enrollment and declared student data for Religious Studies. These data indicate that between 2018-2019 and 2022-2023, overall enrollments declined from about 1200 to about 800 students. Somewhat concerning is the decline in enrollments at the 100 level from 844 students in 2019-2020 to 493 students in 2022-2023 and the decline in enrollments at the 200 level from 371 students to 249 students. Courses at the 300 level are struggling (they are usually capped at 40 students but must reach an enrollment of 15 to avoid cancellation) and 400-level courses are not offered on a regular basis. Like Women's and Gender Studies, Religious Studies faculty maintained that undergraduate enrollments in online synchronous courses were somewhat higher than in-person classes.

The number of Religious Studies declared majors and minors have declined somewhat over the last ten years, ranging from 17 majors in 2016 to 7 majors in 2023 and 15 minors in 2016 and 7 minors in 2023.

The external review team met with most Religious Studies faculty members from the Regina and the federated colleges campuses. We also met with the Deans of Luther College and Campion College. In general, there was agreement among these individuals that a new vision is needed, given what they identified as the declining demand for Religious Studies courses and degree programs.

iii. Program Architecture

As per the 2024-2025 University undergraduate calendar, each of the degree programs in RLST demands that students complete a specified number of required RLST courses, select a specific number of courses from RLST course options, and/or complete courses from the RLST approved course list that are offered in other academic units. Students are also required to complete BA breadth requirements, along with whatever other courses are needed to complete the overall degree and/or the requirements in a second major.

All students enrolled as Religious Studies honours students, majors, and minors must complete RLST 100: Introduction to Religious Studies and RLST 202: Approaches to the Study of Religion, a required theory of religion course. RLST 100 appears to be a prerequisite for most if not all RLST undergraduate courses.

The external review team engaged in discussions with Religious Studies faculty about possible changes to the RLST program architecture. **First, there was a suggestion that RLST faculty members engage in a review and possible rethinking of course prerequisites. Do the existing prerequisites create a structural barrier to students entering and completing RLST degree requirements? Second, there was also discussion about developments in Religious Studies as a discipline and the fact that some Religious Studies programs are moving toward more thematic- and issue-based courses. One of the suggestions that emerged was undertaking a thematic redesign at the 300-level. Other ideas that were floated included promoting RLST courses as electives in or cross-listing courses with other academic units. Like with Women's and Gender Studies, the external review team recommends that RLST faculty conduct a rigorous review of the RLST program, including the program architecture, prerequisites, and course offerings and titles with a focus on enrollments and student recruitment and retention. Can the RLST course offerings be refined and streamlined by engaging in a program mapping exercise? Finally, given that 400-level RLST courses are rarely offered, the RLST faculty members might consider sharing a 400-level capstone seminar for majors and possibly minors with Women's and Gender Studies (see 7.b.iii. above) (Recommendation #10).**

8. Graduate Programs

a. Women's and Gender Studies

Women's and Gender Studies offers a special case graduate program, and courses are taught extra to load. Students take half of their courses in Women's and Gender Studies and an additional three courses relevant to their area of study from outside WGST. It was noted by WGST faculty and graduate students that creating an individualized special case graduate program in WGST can be a very onerous process, from identifying a supervisor, making sure that the needed classes are scheduled, to receiving committee approval.

b. Religious Studies

The graduate program in Religious Studies requires students to take 30 credit hours in RLST, including 15 credit hours for thesis research. Faculty members did mention that they did not receive teaching credit for graduate classes and that supporting graduate students is work done on overload.

While the site visit discussions with the external review team focused mainly on undergraduate programming, there were conversations about possibly re-envisioning graduate programming in the Department; for example, by developing a joint Gender, Religion, and Critical Studies interdisciplinary graduate program or participating in an interdisciplinary Faculty of Arts graduate program. Given the relatively small faculty complement in the Department, there would need to be an assessment as to whether the unit has the teaching and supervisory capacity to sustain an independent interdisciplinary graduate program.

9. Department's Challenges, Opportunities, Priorities, and Aspirations

At a departmental retreat in November 2023, the Gender, Religion, and Critical Studies clearly identified what it considered its strengths and its challenges to be (see Self-Study Report, p. 17), many of which have also been discussed in this report (for example, a potentially shrinking faculty complement; an uncertain sessional budget; challenges in the areas of enrollments and number of majors, etc.). In addition, two of the identified challenges were recurring discussion themes during the site visit:

- People sometimes don't appreciate or know the application of our degrees.
- How to communicate our administrative partnership as a dept to students and broader community (merging of RLST and WGST). Lack of clear understanding of why our dept exists/why our programs are situated together (p. 17).

The Self-Study Report also included an ambitious list of priorities moving forward, all of which the external review team supports:

- **Decolonizing work in both programs. Some of the questions the Department would need to ask are: What would it mean to decolonize both programs? What is the role of non-Indigenous scholars in this work? How to advertise both fields to Indigenous students and the applicability of both programs to Indigenous students (for example, gender-based violence, social justice, Indigenous feminisms and spirituality). A faculty hire in Indigenous feminisms and spirituality could bridge both programs (Recommendation # 11).**
- **Better communication about the Department, the administrative merger of WGST and RLST, and what is possible with a WGST or RLST degree for the purposes of undergraduate student recruitment and retention (enrollments, majors, etc.). Recruitment of alumni (AND current majors active in the student societies) to serve as ambassadors for the two programs (Recommendation # 12).**
- **Explore potential courses that would bridge the two programs (Recommendation #13).**
- **Develop more learning/accessible options for undergraduate students (certificates, online/hybrid course offerings, community engaged and experiential learning opportunities, etc.) (p. 18) (Recommendation #14).**

In its current iteration and except for one faculty member who is cross appointed in both programs, Women's and Gender Studies and Religious Studies currently operate as very separate academic (as opposed to administrative) units. This is also reflected in the way in which this report was written with discrete discussions of WGST and RLST. **The external review team's primary recommendation is that the Department Head organize a retreat (or two) during which Department members hash out the future: by grappling with questions about the unit's identity and future directions; possible opportunities for new academic programming, including at the graduate level; strategies to foster growth in enrollments and declared undergraduate students; as well as the unit's direction, goals, and priorities for the next three to five years. Is it possible to create a coherent Department vision or mission that**

could be communicated with WGST and RLST undergraduate and graduate students? These discussions would create the necessary foundation for a rigorous review of the architectures of Women's and Gender Studies and Religious Studies programs either as separate academic entities or as part of a more cohesive and integrated academic unit that fosters interdisciplinary possibilities (Recommendation #15).

10. Summary and Recommendations

The Department of Gender, Religion, and Critical Studies attends very well to five cornerstone activities that make for a viable academic unit with real potential for further growth and development: high quality scholarly research with very strong faculty publication records; deep commitment to undergraduate teaching (servicing honours students, majors, minors, and especially students across the University) and, as the students emphasized, to student support and success; contributions to graduate training in the Faculty of Arts; a demonstrated and strong commitment to collegial governance and collaborative working environment among faculty members across two former Departments; and very impressive university, professional, and community service. The Department is highly collegial and is deeply committed to the work of Truth and Reconciliation and equity, diversity, and inclusion. Finally, it was very clear during the site visit that WGST and RLST faculty members are passionate about their work and invested in the success of the Department. It is in this spirit that the external review team presents an overview of its recommendations grouped into four thematic categories (with some repetition within each).

a. Department Mission and Future Directions

1. The external review team strongly recommends that the Department Head organize a retreat (or two) during which Department members hash out the future: by grappling with questions about the unit's identity and future directions; possible opportunities for new academic programming, including at the graduate level; strategies to foster growth in enrollments and declared undergraduate students; as well as the unit's direction, goals, and priorities for the next three to five years. Is it possible to create a coherent Department vision or mission that could be communicated with WGST and RLST undergraduate and graduate students? These discussions would create the necessary foundation for a rigorous review of the architectures of Women's and Gender Studies and Religious Studies programs either as separate academic entities or as part of a more cohesive and integrated academic unit that fosters interdisciplinary possibilities (Recommendation #15).

b. Marketing and Promotion

During the site visit, there was discussion about the need to create messaging and profile the Department, especially if majors and minors discover the program after their first year. This messaging could also market the programs in a coherent way and challenge some misperceptions students might hold about both programs.

2. The external review team recommends that the Department update its website, especially with an eye to revising and updating the Women's and Gender Studies and Religious Studies program descriptions (this work has already been completed as versions of the program descriptions can be found in the program mapping documents or in the undergraduate calendar). The program descriptions should be outward facing and focus on student recruitment and retention. The Department might also consider developing a joint program description or mission statement that focuses on, for example, the importance of the critical and interdisciplinary studies of gender and religion from intersectional and multicultural lenses and what Gender, Religion, and Critical Studies can offer both undergraduate and graduate students (Recommendation #1).

3. Based on our meeting with undergraduate students, the external review team recommends that the Department organize information sessions about the honours program and graduate school for current undergraduate students (Recommendation #4).

4. Based on our meeting with undergraduate students, the external review team recommends that the Department explore the possibility of hosting recruitment initiatives in high schools for both programs (lectures, recruitment events, etc.) (Recommendation #5).

5. Based on our meeting with undergraduate students, the external review team recommends that the Department could also increase their visibility on campus through marketing and promotion, a social media campaign, etc. with a focus on what the unit has to offer undergraduate students (course offerings, why major/minor in WGST and RLST, etc.) (Recommendation #6).

6. The external review team recommends that the Department should profile and advertise the Queer, Trans, and Gender Studies Certificate on the website and in all marketing/promotion initiatives (Recommendation #7).

7. In addition to developing strategies (for example, a marketing and promotional campaign) that focus on the benefits of majoring in WGST program or double majoring in WGST and another program, the external review team recommends that the WGST program members also focus on promoting the benefits of minor in WGST as a useful complement to selected majors (Recommendation #8). This recommendations also applies to the Religious Studies program.

8. Better communication about the Department, the administrative merger of WGST and RLST, and what is possible with a WGST or RLST degree for the purposes of undergraduate student recruitment and retention (enrollments, majors, etc.). Recruitment of alumni (AND current majors active in the student societies) to serve as ambassadors for the two programs (Recommendation # 12).

c. Academic Programming

9. While the external review team did not delve into the WGST registration issue that undergraduate students raised, the external review team recommends that the Department

Head or the Dean of the Faculty of Arts raise this problem with the relevant unit on campus. To ensure that students have easy access to WGST 200-, 300-, and 400-level courses, this registration problem should be corrected in the Gateway system as soon as possible (Recommendation #3).

10. The external review team recommends that the WGST program members conduct a rigorous review of the WGST program, including the program architecture, prerequisites, and course offerings and titles with a focus on recruitment and retention at the 100, 200, and 300 levels, introducing declared students to theories and research methodologies at the 300 level, and possibly mounting a capstone course for declared WGST (and RLST) students at the 400 level. (Recommendation #9).

11. With regard to the Religious Studies program architecture, the external review team recommends that Religious Studies faculty members engage in a discussion of the following:

- a review and possible rethinking of course prerequisites. Do the existing prerequisites create a structural barrier to students entering and completing RLST degree requirements?
- a thematic and issue-based course redesign at the 300-level.
- the promotion of RLST courses as electives in or cross-listing courses with other academic units.

In other words, the external review team recommends a rigorous review of the RLST program, including the program architecture, prerequisites, and course offerings and titles with a focus on enrollments and student recruitment and retention. Can the RLST course offerings be refined and streamlined by engaging in a program mapping exercise? Finally, given that 400-level RLST courses are rarely offered, the RLST faculty members might consider sharing a 400-level capstone seminar for majors and possibly minors with Women's and Gender Studies (see 7.b.iii. above) (Recommendation #10).

12. The external review team strongly supports the desire to engage in decolonizing work in both programs. Some of the questions the Department would need to ask are: What would it mean to decolonize both programs? What is the role of non-Indigenous scholars in this work? How to advertise both fields to Indigenous students and the applicability of both programs to Indigenous students (for example, gender-based violence, social justice, Indigenous feminisms and spirituality). A faculty hire in Indigenous feminisms and spirituality could bridge both programs (Recommendation # 11).

13. Depending on the outcome of the recommended retreat(s), the external review team recommends that the Department explore potential courses that would bridge the two programs (Recommendation #13).

14. The external review team supports the Department's desire to develop more learning/accessible options for undergraduate students (certificates, online/hybrid course

offerings, community engaged and experiential learning opportunities, etc.) (p. 18)
(Recommendation #14).

d. Faculty Complement

15. When the budget in the Faculty of Arts permits, the external review team strongly supports allocating one faculty line to the Department of Gender, Religion, and Critical Studies to enhance its faculty complement and teaching capacity and to foster interdisciplinarity by serving as a bridge between the two programs. The area of specialization would be determined by the Department members in consultation with the Dean of the Faculty of Arts
(Recommendation # 2).