The DRTS Curricular Self-Study, 2011 Update
Jonathan Klawans, Director
October 7, 2011

Introduction to Revised Self-Study

The DRTS’s new curriculum—characterized by four “Tracks”—was approved in 2008, and fully implemented the following year. Along with the restructuring of our programs came the development of three new methods courses, and all of our students are required to take at least two of these:

GRS RN 795 Humanities Approaches to Religious Studies
GRS RN 796 Social Science Approaches to Religious Studies
GRS RN 797 Philosophical and Theological Approaches to Religious Studies

Each of these courses is offered as a seminar geared primarily toward graduate students in the DRTS. These courses are open to all GRS and STH students, and happily non-DRTS students have indeed been enrolling (we have even begun to bring in a few non-BU Students through consortium agreements). Indeed, perhaps the most important development to be noted in this update of the DRTS Curricular Self-Study is this: Even in the current enrollment-conscious environment, these three DRTS theory courses have been routinely successful, enrolling DRTS and non-DRTS students (enrollment statistics are below). To preserve the graduate nature of these courses, only exceptionally advanced undergraduates have been given permission to take them. (Undergraduate Religion majors do have their own stand-alone theory course, as described in the RN self-study.)

Beyond these courses, the curriculum of the DRTS consists primarily of courses offered by RN and STH. The upper-level RN course offerings are discussed in the RN self-study.

Step 1, C1. GRS MA Programs outside DRTS whose requirements include coursework in DRTS:

MA in IR & RN (it should be noted that this program is a joint offering of the Departments of IR & RN, not the DRTS):

Students in this program are required to choose one of two of the new DRTS methods courses. And indeed, these students have enrolled in one or another of these courses each time they’ve been offered.

Step 1, D. College Requirements and Programs:

CAS Writing Program: The DRTS has continued to play an important role in the writing program. In the past eight years, well over two dozen DRTS students have been awarded fellowships to teach both WR100 and WR150. As a testament to their teaching ability, all were invited back for a second year.
Step 2. Specific Course Needs:

B1. Course(s) Required of the Entire DRTS:

GRS RN 795 Humanities Approaches to Religious Studies
GRS RN 796 Social Science Approaches to Religious Studies
GRS RN 797 Philosophical and Theological Approaches to Religious Studies

Students in the DRTS are all required to take two out of three of these courses. Students in the MA in IR and RN are also required to choose one of the first two (RN 795 and 796). It is now clear that these courses serve not only the curricular needs of DRTS students but also serve the needs of students in STH, as well as other programs in GRS (graduate students in Philosophy, for instance, have been among those taking these classes). Ideally, a strong RN 795 should appeal to PhD students in English or Comparative Literature whose work may relate to religious themes. A strong RN 796 should appeal to PhD students in Sociology and Anthropology. A strong RN 797 should appeal to PhD students in Philosophy. All three of these courses could appeal to students in various graduate programs in STH.

Enrollment Statistics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Year/Semester</th>
<th>DRTS Students</th>
<th>Other Students</th>
<th>Total Enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RN 796 (Soc)</td>
<td>Fall 2009</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>RN 795 (Hum)</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>RN 797 (Ph/Th)</td>
<td>Fall 2010</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RN 795 (Hum)</td>
<td>Spring 2011</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Fall 2011</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Coverage Plans:

RN 795 Humanities Approaches: offered Spring 2010/2011/2012 by Prof. Christopher Lehrich. Other faculty willing and interested in teaching this course include Profs. Cogan and Klawans, as well as other RN or DRTS faculty. Covering the class will not be difficult, and we will likely continue to offer the course once a year, or every third semester.

RN 796 Social Science Approaches: offered Fall 2009 by Prof. Adam Seligman and Fall 2011 by Prof. Frank Korom. Faculty who are equipped to cover this course include Profs. Ammerman, Korom, and Lehrich, as well as other faculty in Anthropology, Sociology and International Relations. Covering the class will not be difficult, and we will likely continue to offer the course once a year, or every third semester.

RN 797 Philosophical and Theological Approaches: This course made its debut in Fall 2010, taught by Prof. Berthrong. Faculty who can cover this course include Profs. Berthrong, Hart, Neville, Wildman and Zank, along with others perhaps whose primary appointments are in Philosophy. Zank will offer the course in the 2012-2013 academic year, and we can likely continue to offer this course every third or fourth semester (roughly every other year).
B1a. A Curricular Development Under Consideration
During the 2010-2011 academic year, the DRTS faculty considered and approved in principle the idea of developing a fourth methods course to fill in the curricular “blank” left by the fact that the DRTS currently has four disciplinary tracks, but only three methods courses. The fourth course would be RN 798 Scientific Approaches to Religion. A syllabus was developed by Prof. Wesley Wildman (STH) and discussed by the DRTS faculty in Spring 2011. This was then submitted to the CAS HUCC in Fall 2011. Although the formal feedback has not yet come back to the Director of the DRTS and the author of the proposal, it is already clear that the HUCC response will indicate that the proposal’s author and the DRTS faculty as a whole will have additional work to do on the conception of this course and, potentially, the consideration of any curricular change. In the meantime, a form of the course exists within the current STH curriculum. This means that interested DRTS students will continue to have access to a course on this subject area, even if it takes some time to produce a syllabus, course proposal, and curricular change that is fully intelligible and justifiable to the broad range of GRS faculty.

B2. Courses Required for Multiple Programs within DRTS:

Courses: Core Texts and Motifs of World Religion I and II: This course is a two-semester sequence comprised of Western Religions (STH TT901 A1) =GRS RN 723) and Eastern Religions (STH TT902 A1=GRS RN 724). Currently, this sequence is required of students in Track 2 (Religious Thought) and Track 4 (Religion and Science). There are currently 5 first and second year students in Track 4, and 4 first and second year students in Track 2.

Each course of this sequence will continue to be offered every other year. Repeating earlier patterns, the Eastern component was offered Fall 2009 by Prof. Lobel and the Western component was offered in Fall 2010 by Wegter-McNelly. The eastern component is being offered again in Fall 2011 by Prof. Lobel, and Prof. Wegter McNelly will offer the Western component again in the future when needed. Profs. Berthrong, and Neville have also expressed interest in teaching one or another sections of this course. Long-term coverage for this course is not a problem. Provided we offer each section of the sequence every other year (or so), we should be able to meet our curricular needs while also maintaining enrollments above the current minimal guidelines.

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<tr>
<td>RN 724 (East)</td>
<td>Fall 2011</td>
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Step 3: Planning for Effective, Efficient, Equitable and Sustainable Course Staffing:

Beyond planning for effective and sustainable coverage for its curricular core, the primary responsibility for maintaining equitable and efficient staffing for graduate courses rests on the leaders of the units whose faculty will contribute the bulk of DRTS’s elective offerings: the Chair of RN and the Dean of STH. For the former, see RN’s Curricular Self-Study. As for the curricular core itself:
effective teaching is in rich supply. The Director will work with the RN Chair and STH Dean to ensure coverage of our curricular core.

Step 4: Executive Summary of Updates and Ten-Year Planning

Now that the DRTS’s curriculum update has been implemented, we continue to move forward, increasing the quality of our programs and contributing to the future success of our graduate students. Our current curriculum highlights the talents of the current DRTS faculty: our work is methodologically rigorous and it is frequently either explicitly comparative in nature or otherwise situated at the intersections of religious traditions and disparate cultures (e.g., the ancient Judaism and Christian Origins; Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism in India). Our curricular core—especially the methods courses—reflects the first of these strengths; the interdisciplinary nature of the DRTS’s four new “Tracks” and the ever-changing variety of upper-level electives highlight the second of these strengths.

The DRTS stands to compete with other excellent programs in Religion as was recognized by the NRC’s 2010 report. Along with our own resources, our graduate students can register in courses offered by other members of the Boston Theological Institute (BTI, including Harvard Divinity School, Boston College’s School of Theology, and now the Hebrew College in Newton). So Boston’s rich academic resources are more readily available to students of the DRTS than they are to many other students in GRS. A number of our best students find the BTI and/or Boston’s rich economic and cultural opportunities particularly attractive, whether for themselves or their partners, spouses and/or children. The DRTS can and should effectively capitalize on these resources to continue to increase the quality of our applicant pool and incoming classes.

Of course, there is one advantage that the best programs have over ours—money. Each year, we lose some percentage of our best prospective students to other programs (e.g., Chicago, Duke, Harvard) that have offered better multi-year packages than we are able to. Happily, GRS’s newer and more flexible practices with the Dean’s Fellowships have worked (so far) to our advantage, and we were able to attract a higher percentage of our admitted students (2011 admit rate: 19%; accept rate: 68%).

Another possible source of funding—as well as enrollments—is a terminal Master’s Program. Each year a notable portion of our applications are directed toward the MA program, even though the vast majority of our own efforts in reviewing applications and recruiting students have been directed toward the PhD. With our curriculum revision in place and the MA in IR and RN underway, now is the time for the DRTS faculty to consider whether it wants to develop its MA program as an attractive first step toward other PhD programs. Possibly, we could attract talented students willing to pay tuition in order to reap the benefits of our methodologically rigorous interdisciplinary offerings.

Finally, the DRTS’s future stands also to be greatly enhanced by the promise of important contributions by our current junior faculty, who are not able (understandably) to shoulder the administrative burden of the DRTS or the academic commitment of guiding dissertations. Both STH and RN have sizable percentages of junior faculty who hold great promise for important contributions in the coming years.