MISSION STATEMENT

The Department of Religious Studies promotes learning and research through descriptive, comparative, and analytical studies of cross-cultural beliefs and practices, both past and present. The Department is therefore one of the principal arenas in the University where students critically engage the history, diversity, and ingenuity of human collections of beliefs and rituals. These efforts foster intellectual development that strengthens the abilities of scholars to critically, actively, and effectively engage the issues confronting a technologically changing, interconnected world.

revised November 2010
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INTRODUCTION

In the remarks that accompanied the directive to departments in the College of Arts and Sciences to compose a five-year strategic plan (in 2005), Dean Olin advanced certain concerns. He wrote:

I am looking for visionary departments that are developing new or improved ways to help students learn. (I am also looking for departments that have in place ways to demonstrate this improved learning.) I am looking for departments that have a keen and targeted vision of where and how they will achieve or advance national and international recognition. I am looking for departments that are embracing interdisciplinary research/scholarship.

In these brief introductory remarks, I will signal some of the ways in which the Religious Studies Department's 2010-2015 Five-Year Strategic Plan engages these concerns. The rest of this document, then, will spell out in more detail who the Department is, what the Department has done during the last five years, and what it intends to do during the next five years in the effort to advance the cause of excellence at the University of Alabama.

1. New or improved ways to help students learn (and ways of demonstrating improved learning)

During the next five years, the Department of Religious Studies intends to advance the learner-centered emphases of the University in significant ways. First of all, we intend to increase our commitment to the University's General Education (Core) requirements by developing more and better Core courses—in large-enrollment classes, small Honors sections, and online. At the same time, we will continue to offer smaller seminar-style courses for 15 or fewer students—an environment in which students learn to collaborate with each other while participating in on-going discussions centered around key texts and topics in the field of religious studies. Second, as a component of our smaller courses, we intend to increase our "W" offerings. These are writing courses that will emphasize a common set of skills across topics. While these courses will benefit some students who are not our majors, they will also lead our most-advanced students toward thesis writing: a program option we intend to develop in order to position our graduates well for admission into leading graduate schools in religious studies and related fields. Third, we intend to foster an atmosphere of academic engagement by offering lectures that students will both attend and reflect upon afterwards in writing as well as discussion venues. We will develop a rigorous academic program around our lecture series that will enable those students who choose to pursue the matter to receive academic credit in return for essays that respond to specific issues raised in the lectures. Fourth, we will continue to develop both our student association and our honors society, enabling students to travel in community to academic conferences as well as historical sites. In addition to measuring student learning in ways compatible with the Learning Outcomes Assessment initiative advanced recently by Dr. Bob Smallwood, we intend to find ways to incorporate different kinds of learning experiences (e.g., field trips) into our assessment measures as well as the seasoned reflections of both recent and distant alumni.

2. Vision for advancing national and international recognition

Our effort to advance the national and international recognition of our Department will be engaged on three fronts. First of all, we intend to develop a Council for the Study of Religion on the University campus. This Council will support individual and collaborative research on topics related to the study of religion, providing a venue for publicizing research as well as a congenial atmosphere
in which research can be conducted. While this Council will benefit the faculty and students of the Department, it is intended to involve faculty and students from a broad range of disciplines, serving as a model of cooperative scholarly endeavor. The publications that result from this work will enhance the Department's already-impressive publication record. Second, the Department will continue to support the activities of its members as they participate in leadership roles in national and international academic societies (e.g., International Association for the History of Religions; American Academy of Religions; Modern Language Association). Third, by developing a rigorous program for our majors leading, for some, to the composition of a significant undergraduate thesis, we hope to acquire a reputation for producing well-trained scholars who can thrive academically in the nation's and the world's top graduate programs.

3. Interdisciplinary Research and Scholarship
While the Department has a long history of advancing inter-departmental cooperation and collaboration around such events as lectures and symposia, I would point again to the formation of at the Council on the Study of Religion as a concerted effort on the part of this department to advance interdisciplinary research and scholarship for faculty and students at various levels of achievement across the University.

These are some of the ways we intend to respond to the Dean's concerns in the coming half decade. A fuller picture is contained in the following pages.

I. DEPARTMENT PROFILE
The University of Alabama's Department of Religious Studies was established in the late-1960s. For most of the 20th century it consisted of three faculty members plus a variety of part-time adjunct instructors. The Aaron Aronov Chair for Judaic Studies was formally established in 1990, thereby adding a fourth member to the Department. In 1998, at the instigation of the Provost's Office, a position in Asian Religions was inaugurated. The Department successfully pursued a targeted hire in African American religions and literatures in 2006, raising the number of faculty to a total of six members. Since 2003, the Department has also maintained one Full-Time Teaching Instructor position. Currently the Department's faculty complement stands at 6 tenure-track positions plus one Full-Time Teaching Instructorship. This number has been more-or-less constant since the academic year 2006-2007 and is the largest number of faculty members the Department has attained in its history. (A detailed chronology of Departmental appointments is presented in Appendix 1.) The Department offers three online CORE courses that are administered and taught by a Part-Time Teaching Instructor. The Department also includes two staff members: one Administrative Secretary and one part-time Office Assistant. The Department hosted 56 majors during the 2009-10 academic year—the largest number of students ever enrolled as Religious Studies majors.

Of the Department's six faculty members, four are tenured: two at the rank of Professor (McCutcheon, Trost) and two as Associate Professor (Jacobs, Murphy). One is an Assistant Professor in the fifth year of the tenure-track, applying for tenure in 2010 (Ramey). The sixth began a tenure-track appointment in the fall 2010 as Assistant Professor (Simmons).

Since the last strategic plan, significant changes have occurred in the Department. First, Russell McCutcheon stepped down as chair in August 2009; in the fall of 2010, he assumed the position of Associate Information Officer in the College of Arts and Sciences; his teaching assignment in the
Department has been reduced to one course per semester. Second, Theodore Trost assumed the position of chair in the fall of 2009; consequently, his appointment was changed from 75% in Religious Studies (with 25% in New College) to a 100% appointment in Religious Studies. Third, Maha Marouan was the subject of a targeted affirmative action hire in the Religious Studies Department in the fall of 2006; during the course of her appointment in Religious Studies, her research, teaching, and service interests developed in a direction better suited to another department; and so, upon the successful completion of the 4th Year Review in Religious Studies, Dr. Marouan transferred to a tenure-track position in the Department of Gender and Race where, among other responsibilities, she serves as director of the African American Studies program. Fourth, Merinda Simmons, who was hired by the Department as a Full-Time Teaching Instructor in 2008, joined the faculty as Assistant Professor in 2010.

The Department's faculty complement has not increased appreciably since our last strategic plan but has remained at about 6 FTE for the last five years. In terms of the overall stability of the Department, however, the Religious Studies Department has been qualitatively transformed during the last five years. In 2005, the Department of Religious Studies had one tenured faculty member; in 2010 it is a department with four tenured faculty members and the likelihood of a fifth tenured member by the end of the 2010-11 academic year. In other words, we have gone from having only one tenured faculty member to having only one untenured faculty member during the period between reports.

The areas of research and teaching expertise represented by the full-time faculty (in alphabetical order) are:

Dr. Steve Jacobs—Holocaust and genocide studies; Hebrew Bible; history of Judaism

Dr. Russell McCutcheon—history of the study of religion; theories of myth/ritual; sociology of religion (teaching appointment in REL)

Dr. Tim Murphy—semiotics; modern Continental religious thought; Native American and Caribbean religions

Dr. Steven Ramey—Religions of Asia; Hinduisms past and present; religion and social identity

Dr. Merinda Simmons—religion and literature; religion and African American Studies; women, religion, and the South

Dr. Theodore Trost—religion and popular culture; religion and textual studies; American religious history

The areas of research and teaching expertise represented by the Full-Time Teaching Instructor are:

Dr. Christopher Johnson—Eastern and Western Christianity; the study of religion; Celtic Christianity
The Religious Studies staff includes:

Ms. Betty Dickey—Administrative Secretary

Ms. Donna Martin—Office Associate II (half-time, 9 month contract)

II. REVIEW OF DEPARTMENT GOALS

The Department of Religious Studies submitted its previous "Five-Year Strategic Plan" in November 2005. That plan, in turn, was developed out of the "Action Plan" composed by then-chair Russell McCutcheon in consultation with the Department faculty in response to the 2002-2003 "8-Year Academic Program Review." Since these plans overlap, the "Action Plan" is considered here first, followed by a synopsis of the goals described in the 2005 Strategic Five-Year Plan. A third section comments upon "Initiatives" projected in the Strategic Plan.

A. Goals of the 2004 "Action Plan"

1. Curricular Reform

The Eight-Year Review called for modifications of the curriculum so that the Department's program and course offerings would align more closely with what was depicted in the Undergraduate Catalogue. A completely revised and coherent curriculum was implemented for the fall semester 2005. This curriculum has served the Department without significant modification in subsequent years. It serves as the foundation upon which all further curricular reform will be built—as discussed below in our plan for continuing curricular improvement.

2. Classroom Space

The Department sought to obtain control of the Manly 210 classroom space in order to teach seminar classes of 15 to 18 students. This room had been under the control of the English Department for many years. In 2006, the Religious Studies Department was granted the classroom space. The Department immediately undertook a complete renovation of the room—at the Department's own expense. The classroom has become a key learning space for our students; it is also the place where faculty meetings and student association gatherings usually take place. With room allocation now under the direction of a centralized booking system, this room continues to be used primarily (but certainly not exclusively) by the Religious Studies Department.

3. Cross-Listing Courses

The recommendation to cross-list our courses with other departments was advocated by the outside consultant as part of the Eight-Year Review report. The reasoning behind this recommendation was two-fold: to allow our majors to get credit for the major by taking courses with significant religious studies content in other departments; and to introduce potential majors to the Religious Studies professoriate (a commodious confluence that had, in the past, attracted a few Blount students to the Religious Studies major). The whole Department deliberated about this matter for some time. Ultimately we decided to grant credit routinely toward our major for courses taken outside of our department (in History, Anthropology, Blount, and Honors, for example) when these courses engaged religious studies topics or advanced methods and theories central to the study of religion.
Experimentally, we cross-listed several courses with the African American Studies program and the Women's Studies Department during the last two years; this effort did not result in an influx of students to the Religious Studies Department, but the timeframe may be insufficient for drawing long-term conclusions. As we rethink our relationship with other departments in the College and the University, we remain open to this option of cross-listing, especially with reference to the plan for a Council on the Study of Religion discussed below.

4. Reduce number of hours required for the major

The Program Review recommended we reduce the number of hours required for the major from 36 to 30. Already in 2005, the required number of hours for the major was reduced to 33 hours. This appears to have worked well, particularly when combined with the flexibility the Department offers with respect to making course substitutions. As we review our curriculum in the coming year, we are open to the possibility of lowering this number of requisite hours to 30 but the need to do so is not urgent.

5. Recruit a Scholar of Islam

As a means of advancing the Department's mission to "promote learning and research through descriptive, comparative, and analytical studies of cross-cultural beliefs and practices, both past and present," the Program Review committee recommended that effort be engaged toward bringing an Islamicist into the Department. Our successful hiring of Dr. Maha Marouan, a multi-disciplinary scholar capable of teaching courses on Arabic as well as "Women and Islam," was one response to this recommendation, although these kinds of courses were not taught by Dr. Marouan during her tenure with our department (see next item). The Department welcomed Steven Ramey to its ranks in the fall of 2005. Dr. Ramey specializes in religions of the Indian subcontinent and in this context addresses Islam in that region of the world. The Department also brought a number of lecturers on campus to address historical and contemporary issues related to Islam beginning already in 2001 with Professor Bruce Lawrence's lecture "Conjuring with Islam: Who Speaks for Muslims After September 11?" and continuing, during the period after the program review, with Professor Herbert Berg's 2008 lecture "The Historical Muhammad and the Historical Jesus: A Comparison of Scholarly Reinventions and Reinterpretations" and Professor Bruce Lincoln's 2007 Aronov Lecture "In Praise of Things Chaotic: Politics in Creation Mythology." The Religious Studies Department remains interested in bringing a scholar of Islam to the campus, perhaps in collaboration with another department.

6. Diversity Appointment

In an effort to diversify the Department's ethnic make-up and to respond to the desire to recruit an African or African American scholar to the University, the Program Review recommended that the Department pursue a targeted minority hire. In 2005, the Department hosted a conference on the "African Diaspora and the Study of Religion." This conference brought to campus a number of young scholars, most in the late stages of dissertation writing. Subsequently the Religious Studies Department offered a Full-Time Teaching Instructor position to one of the conference participants, Maha Marouan, a citizen of Morocco who was completing her doctoral studies in African diaspora literature and religions at the University of Nottingham, England. Upon completion of her PhD, Dr. Marouan applied for, and attained, a tenure-track position in African and African American Religions in the Department of the Religious Studies—where she served until 2010. In the fall of
2010, her position was transferred to the recently-established Department of Gender and Race Studies, where she serves the College's interests in a variety of capacities including Director of the African American Studies Program. The topical emphases that Dr. Marouan brought to the Department continue to be addressed through the work of Dr. Merinda Simmons, a scholar of African American literature with an emphasis on women and religion. Dr. Simmons was appointed assistant professor in the Department in 2010.

7. Undergrad Teaching Assistants for REL 100

A final recommendation was to expand the REL 100 course offering slightly from two sections of 120 students each in the fall and one section of 120 students in the spring to, perhaps 150 students per section. To facilitate this expansion it was recommended that advanced undergraduate students should be hired to assist in the logistics of the class: collecting and distributing assignments; tabulating test results; assisting with classroom technology; etc. With financial assistance from the Dean's office, this expansion was initiated in 2005. A variety of additional courses have subsequently been added to the Department's roster in an effort to meet the University's demand for seats in Core courses.

B. Goals of the 2000-2005 Five-Year Strategic Plan

The goals from the November 2005 Strategic Plan can be organized around three areas of concern.

1. Improving the Program to Benefit our Students

First, with respect to students, we sought (1) to increase the number of our majors. In 2005, we had 33 majors; by 2010 we had 56. Further, we projected (2) a number of strategies to recruit students to and retain them in our program. In 2009, Merinda Simmons took over the leadership of our Religious Studies Student Association; it has become a very active association with a diverse array of activities planned throughout the year. Also in 2009, we appointed Christopher Johnson as faculty adviser to the Theta Alpha Kappa honors society. That society has six members two of whom have won awards from the national organization in the last year. We sought (3) to create research opportunities for our majors, first by exposing them to academic research at various regional conferences during the last five years. We have also encouraged participation in the College-wide, and subsequently University-wide student research forum. In 2009, one of our students won an award for research in the Humanities. We intend to expand our commitment to student research significantly in the coming years. Additional commitments to students include (4) improved advising and (5) the development of study abroad possibilities. We have developed a system of advising online and extended advising responsibilities to all faculty members. We have also inaugurated a relationship with the Religion Department at Aristotle University that resulted in two successful interim courses abroad as well as a faculty exchange (bringing an advanced graduate student onto our faculty for one semester).

2. Increasing our Commitment to the Core

A second area of concern had to do with our contribution to the General Studies requirements (Core) of the University. Our response has been two-fold. First, the entire faculty has made a commitment to teach the large enrollment REL 100 course on a rotational basis. Second, we have expanded our Core offerings to include these Core offerings: REL 105 (Honors Introduction to the
Study of Religion); REL 112 (New Testament); and REL 220 (Asian Religions). Over the course of
the last three years, we have developed four online Core courses, all of which will be available by
Summer 2011: REL 100, REL 110, REL 112, and REL 220.

3. Developing a Learner-Centered Department

A third area of concern had to do with the goal of becoming a learner-centered institution. With
regard to this goal, the Department has fully embraced the Student Learning Outcomes initiative
advanced by Dr. Robert Smallwood. Steven Jacobs serves currently as the department's outcomes
assessment coordinator. Junior faculty members (Ramey and Simmons) have been trained in
outcomes based assessment strategies for learner-centered education. Beyond this, we expanded our
emphasis on student associations (communities of learners) particularly through the work of
Merinda Simmons and Christopher Johnson. The Department has a long history of learner-
centered commitments as signaled by the consistently large number of students who design
individualized projects with faculty members as out-of-load independent study courses.

C. Initiatives Recommended in the 2000-2005 Five-Year Strategic Plan

1. The 2010 Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR).

In the Fall of 2005, the Department's faculty voted to use a portion of Departmental funds to
provide "seed" money to assist the North American Association for the Study of Religion to host
the 20th World Congress of the IAHR. The IAHR is the field's only international event; it takes
place once every five years, most recently in Tokyo (2005). The Department also voted to commit a
portion of one student worker's time to assist the planning committee with publicity. Because of
this Department's early financial and labor commitments to this event, the IAHR was able to hold
this important meeting in Toronto in August 2010. Russell McCutcheon represented the
Department at the Congress and introduced one of the keynote speakers. In the aftermath of the
Congress, the American Academy of Religion announced its intention to join the IAHR.

2. Cross-Disciplinary M.A. in Critical Thought and Culture

In 2006, the Department engaged in several conversations with New College concerning the
possibility of proposing a cross-disciplinary M.A. in Critical Thought and Culture. This program, it
was suggested, would provide a site for cross-disciplinary work regarding the ways cultures are
created, reproduced, and contested. Although the proposal did not advance beyond the preliminary
conversation phase, the Department remains committed to providing a site for cross-disciplinary
and inter-disciplinary work across program, departmental, and college lines. Our discussion about a
Council on the Study of Religion emerges in part from these earlier conversations with New College.

3. Cooperate with the Capstone International Program

The Department signaled two concerns with regard to the Capstone International Program. First,
we encouraged students enrolled in the "Global Certificate Program" to take REL courses as
electives in that concentration. Second, in 2008 we developed a study abroad opportunity for our
students at Aristotle University in Greece under the direction of Russell McCutcheon. This program
has developed significantly in recent years; it has involved a visiting scholar from Aristotle University.
in the life of our department; and it has expanded to involve other units within the College of Arts and Sciences. Our relationship with Aristotle University is on-going.

4. Explore ways for REL to participate in the Honor College's annual "Moral Forum"

Conversations between this Department and the Center for Ethics and Social Responsibility did not result in plans for collaborative projects or academic partnerships. In the Spring 2010, the Department did initiate a conversation with the then-acting dean of the Honors College concerning a variety of topics of mutual concern (Honors sections of our Core courses; Honors "W" courses; thesis writing for honors recognition; the development of an academic advisory board for the Honors College). We intend to pursue this relationship in the coming years.

5. Design online distance education version of REL 100

Our original intention was to begin work on an online REL 100 Introduction to the Study of Religion course in early 2006. As noted above, Steven Ramey developed an online course, REL 220: Survey of Asian Religions, in 2007; and Theodore Trost developed an online course, REL 112: New Testament, in 2008. Currently Steve Jacobs is developing REL 110: Hebrew Bible and Merinda Simmons is developing the REL 100 course.

III. GOALS FOR THE 2010-2015 FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

The Department's Long-Range Planning Committee—co-chaired by Steven Ramey and Merinda Simmons and in conversation with other members of the Department—has identified eight goals that constitute the Religious Studies Department's Strategic Plan for 2010-2015. These are discussed briefly below. Each of these goals is discussed separately and in more detail in the draft documents contained in the appendix.

1. Council for the Study of Religion at the University of Alabama

We seek to establish a coordinating council made up of faculty and graduate students across the College and University whose research and teaching interests include the study of religion. The Council would be housed in the Department of Religious Studies and the Department would also offer staff support to the Council. The Council would serve a variety of functions on campus, including:

   A. Coordinate Interdisciplinary lecture series involving presenters from nation, region, university
      —course credit/extra credit for attending lectures

The Department's current "Religion in Culture Lecture Series" would be developed through the Council in an effort to bring to the campus and to identify on campus lectures whose writing and research is of particular interest to those constituencies represented on the Council. To foster an environment of support for research and a culture of lecture-attending, the Religious Studies Department plans to develop a one-credit course around the lecture series, granting academic credit for fulfilling specific lecture-related assignments.
B. Forum on research
In addition to the Lecture Series, the Council will function as a forum for research, encouraging (through an e-mail list-serve, occasion brown bag lunch gatherings, and occasional papers, etc.) interdisciplinary collaboration among the members of the Council.

C. Hub for identifying and nurturing scholars of religion across disciplines
—identify courses in other departments/programs that could "serve" the RS major
In addition to serving as a gathering place for scholars, the Council will gather and disseminate information concerning courses, lectures, and other opportunities that would benefit Religious Studies undergraduate students as well as students from other departments in the University.

D. GTA's assigned to RS from other departments to assist in REL 100 and other courses where appropriate
As part of their professionalization, the Religious Studies Department proposes to provide office space and teaching opportunities for graduate students from other departments who have a significant teaching and research concern in the study of religion.

2. Research and Writing Component to Curriculum

A. Improve and systematize "W" offerings
As part of its on-going and expanding commitment to the University's General Education requirements, the Religious Studies Department will expand its "W" course offerings, eventually to at least one per semester. Under the direction of Merinda Simmons, a writing specialist, we intend to standardize our approach to the "W" course to ensure that anyone taking any of our "W" courses will acquire certain writing skills.

B. Develop thesis option possibly in cooperation with Honors
With particular reference to our own majors, we intend to develop a one- or two-semester thesis writing option to better position our graduates for access to top-level graduate programs.

C. Direct students to Venues for Writing
TAK Essay Competition (Religious Studies Honors Society)
Regional American Academy of Religion Student Research Panel
University Research Forum
Departmental Student-Centered Lunchtime Research Forum
Departmental Essay Award (compare Silverstein)
Through our various professional affiliations and through opportunities available on this campus, we intend to foster an atmosphere of scholarship focused upon research and writing. We have identified five venues in which this value might be advanced, including the possibility of developing an annual departmental essay award.

3. Commitment to the Core

A. Diversify Core Offerings
The Department currently offers four Core courses: REL 100 (maximum enrollment 160); REL 110 (maximum enrollment 30); REL 112 (maximum enrollment 50); and REL 220 (maximum enrollment 50). In addition to gradually increasing the enrollments in REL 110 and REL 112, we
plan to develop one or two more courses that will carry the Core designation ("Religion and Popular Culture," for example; or "Religion and Ethics").

B. Constantly update and expand on-line offerings
By Summer 2011, the Department will offer all four of the above-mentioned Core courses on-line. This represents a major commitment on the part of the Department to the online environment. We also recognize the necessity of maintaining these courses by adding new material (lectures, exercises) in a timely manner. This becomes a crucial matter during an era of increasing enrollments and demand for online courses.

4. Modify Major Requirements to Emphasize Interdisciplinarity

While we are satisfied with the curricular reforms initiated in 2004 and 2005, the desire to double the number of majors in the Department during the next five years requires a bit more flexibility than is currently built into the program. In addition to the existing "track," then, with its various "area" requirements, we plan to develop an interdisciplinary track for the major that would identify courses taught in other departments and count them as fulfilling requirements toward the Religious Studies major. Information concerning these courses would be acquired through the Council on Religious Studies mentioned above.

A. Develop REL 200 course for majors on method and theory
As part of this curricular reform, we might change the lower division major requirement from REL 100—a Core course that addresses the interests of students throughout the University—to a newly-designed REL 200 course that would focus on issues and concerns pertaining to majors and minors in the study of religion.

5. Advising

A. Develop e-Learning online arrangement for efficiency
B. Involve all faculty in advising relationship
The Religious Studies Department has entered into a conversation with e-Tech toward locating most of our departmental advising forms onto an e-Learning site. We also anticipate making our "Survey of Religious Studies Knowledge" test (used for Learning Outcomes measurement purposes) available on that site. Currently all faculty who have a service assignment in the Department are engaged in the advising process. We intend to ensure that Advising assignments are evenly distributed among the faculty during the period of the strategic plan.

6. Study Abroad

A. Greece Interim
B. Greek Scholar
Since 2008, the Religious Studies Department has been developing ties with the Religion Department at Aristotle University, Thessaloniki, Greece. So far, we have taken two groups of religious studies students to Thessaloniki, with a third trip planned for the interim semester, 2011. In addition, during the Spring semester 2010, the department hosted a visiting Full Time Teaching Instructor, a doctoral candidate in Religion at Aristotle, who taught one course in the Modern Languages and Classics Department in addition to three courses in our department. We intend to continue both of these programs during the next five years—possibly expanding the study abroad
program to include a semester abroad at Aristotle University. We also plan to lead the College's effort to develop an ongoing institution-to-institution relationship with Aristotle University by arranging with other departments a series of symposia around the topic of Greece, broadly-construed. These events will take place during the Spring semester 2011.

C. College Initiatives
Beyond the developing relationship with Aristotle University, the Department is interested in offering other study-abroad opportunities for our students (and faculty). Possible venues for learning opportunities include Amsterdam and Israel. We intend to explore these possibilities during the next five-year period.

7. Judaic Studies Minor

In much the same way that the Department hopes to advance the possibilities for interdisciplinarity for the benefit of Religious Studies majors, we also hope to develop a broadly interdisciplinary "track" for our Judaic Studies minors, using especially the resources that are already available to our students through courses offered in other departments across the University. Steven Jacobs, as Aaron Aronov Chair of Judaic Studies, is engaged in a study to determine what resources are available to our students and to identify scholars across the University whose collaborations might serve to broaden the appeal of the Judaic Studies minor.

8. Increase Faculty

To advance the mission of the Department by exposing students to a diverse range of beliefs and rituals, to extend our course offerings for the benefit of our students, and to further supplement the Core during a period of continuing expansion, we anticipate adding two or three additional faculty lines to our roster during the next five years. In addition, as a site for the professionalization of junior scholars, we hope to maintain permanently one Full-Time Teaching Instructor line. The opportunity before us is discussed in slightly more detail below.

A. Islamicist
One recommendation emerging from the last 8-year review report was to create a position in the Study of Islam. As discussed above, we are fortunate to have a faculty member, Steven Ramey, who specializes in religions of Southern Asia, including Islam. We also had on our faculty, for a time, Maha Marouan—who had in the past (though not during her time in this department) taught courses having to do with Islam. There is great student interest across the campus in Islam—its historical development, particularly in the Mideast, and its relation to Judaism and Christianity. The Religious Studies Department is the logical home for a scholar of Islam, a subject area sorely lacking on campus at the moment.

B. Christian Origins
Both as a component of the Core and as an aspect of the Religious Studies major, there is a great deal of student interest in Christian Origins and the study of Christianity in general. The response to courses on the Bible (Jacobs and Trost) and Christian Theology (Murphy) bear out this assessment. For several years, the Department retained at its own expense a Full-Time Teaching Instructor, Gabrielle Fassbeck, whose courses in this area were well-received. Currently in progress is a plan to establish at some time in the distant future an Endowed Chair in Christian Studies. It might make sense to develop that subject area sooner rather than later.