

Dr. Kevin Bond A/Head
Department of Gender, Religion and Critical Studies
Faculty of Arts
Dear Dr. Bond:

Thank you for taking the time on February 6, 2025 to meet with the Council Committee on Academic Mission and providing the department's response to the recent academic unit review. The meeting was extremely useful for the committee in providing clarification about the long-term effects of merging the two departments as well as highlighting the connections and disconnects between the two programs. It was informative to hear that the review process had been useful for the department and that faculty members have been taking up and responding to all the recommendations within its purview. The committee also commended the department for the initiatives already undertaken and offers the following observations to help guide and support the department's ongoing work.

Identity, both internal and external, was a theme in the Academic Unit Review report and also featured prominently in the discussion with CCAM. While the administrative merger has been successful and the curricular and programming initiatives have been collegial, there are arguments made that more can and should be done. As mentioned in the department's response, there is a need to develop a stronger narrative which explains the merger and provides a coherent vision for the future. Ideally, this vision should encourage stronger connections within the department while at the same time recognizing and respecting the necessary differences between the two programs. While this vision should benefit GRCS, it will most likely not address the challenges around the nomenclature, more specifically the name of the department. It seems essential that the department continue and expand upon the educational work being done on and off campus, work closely with the University's recruitment staff, and raise awareness across campus of your programs (degrees, minors, certificates) and faculty research (and the interdisciplinary nature of both). The committee noted that the term "Critical Studies" in the name of the department seems to suggest a third area of studies in addition to gender and religion. This could be a source of confusion for people outside of the department.

The committee concluded that the curricula in both programs need more attention. This curricular work would necessarily align with the department's emergent narrative and the goals of both programs; and it should build on the strengths of the current faculty complement. The committee, like the department, is aware that past collaborative partnerships, especially in Religious Studies, are not operating as they once did. A deep dive into the curriculum needs to recognize this and move forward with the opportunities the current situation provides. As suggested by the department, thematic courses might be a good approach to curriculum renewal. Given that both programs are somewhat interdisciplinary in nature, the committee encourages the department to look beyond the synergies found within the department to possible collaborations with various departments, faculties and faculty members across the university.

The committee recognizes that much of what we are recommending is found within the external report and importantly in the department's verbal response to that report. We suggest that these initiatives will help in the development and long-term success of the department. The committee recognizes the need for the hiring of a tenure stream position in Religious Studies especially if the program is to survive post forthcoming retirements.

The members of CCAM are well aware of the considerable time and labour that an academic unit review requires and this is especially the case in smaller departments. As a committee we do not say this enough but we recognize the hard work that the department has already done and congratulate all the members of the department for the positive spirit in which they entered into the process and continue to demonstrate as the work continues.

Thanks again for the great discussion and the committee looks forward to hearing about future successes of your programs and department.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Wes Pearce', with a stylized, cursive script.

Wes Pearce
Chair, CCAM

cc: Shannon Dea, Dean, Faculty of Arts
david Gregory, Interim Provost and Vice-President (Academic)
Nilgün Önder, AVP (Academic)