Theology Department

February 6, 2015

*1) What are the strengths of your department/program? What do you already do well?  Remember that these responses will be shared with the community at large, so please use this opportunity to brag a little bit.  What do you want people outside your department/program to know about your successes and strengths?*

Responding to the changing demographics of our students, who may not be Catholic, churched, and are more international. We have shifted the focus of THEO 111 because of these changes.

We have recently changed our learning goals in THEO 111. More attentive to the goals of the institutions as liberal arts, and more conscious about learning goals that have to do with teaching students how to learn. Emphasizing skills as much as content.

Service a significant number of courses every year in the common curriculum -any given semester 15 sections of 111 and 16 or 17 upper division Theology - while also having a major and minor. Also contribute to FYS and ES.

External review noted that a key strength of the Theology faculty is dedication to students inside and outside the classroom. Foster a holistic development of students, which serves the Catholic mission of the institutions.

Strengthened the major and minor components – sending students on to good graduate programs. Revised the curriculum for the major, introduced new courses for just majors and minors, separate from the TU courses. Run three distinct tracks in the major – including concentrations in pastoral ministry and education. Now have students going to Notre Dame, Duke, Yale, doing excellent post BA work.

Faculty witness with their lives – students see alignment between what happens in class and in how professors live.

Can get a Masters in five years – stay on an extra year at the School of Theology.

Outside programming - lots of diverse external speakers through Koch Chair and Jay Phillips Center. These opportunities are integrated into the classroom by individual instructors.

Try to make sure that our upper division curriculum fits in with other programs and department, making connection across the divisions, like Peace Studies, Gender, Asian studies.

Are integrated across the university because of the various roles that individual faculty plays – monastic roles, faculty appointments, other chairs. Expands the mission of the department into other departments. Professors in other departments can petition to teach a TU course.

Lots of students do Benedictine Volunteer Corps, National Catholic Youth Choir, service and ministry, leadership development.

Have an assessment plan for the common curriculum courses. Have a good plan in place, assess a particular goal per year. Recent changes to learning goals are based in assessment.

Strongly academic department. Other departments don’t think of theology as strongly academic. We challenge our students with difficult material. We publish. We do a lot of scholarship, broad range. Get together at the end of each semester to discuss our research. Do interesting projects with out students.

Wide range of subdisciplines - Scriptural studies, philosophical theology, spirituality, ethics, moral philosophy, liturgy, Islam, pastoral. Most Catholic schools don’t have that kind of range.

Not doing too badly in interdisciplinary studies.

St John’s Bible

*2) What do you wish you could do better, or do more of?  What would it take (resources, support, etc.) for you to reach those goals?*

We aren’t solicitous of other departments to get them to cross list courses with theology.

Would like stronger relationships with other departments interested in teaching TUs.

Strengthen community ties, service learning kinds of endeavors. But service learning for such big classes is not feasible. The class size of 25-35 is an impediment.

Need to make our major and minor more accessible, which might mean making them more compatible with requirements of other departments and possibly combining majors.

Not communicating as well as we could the value of the St John’s Bible to community outside theology.

Offer more electives for our major classes; we can’t offer any electives as major-only classes (or major/minor-only classes) to our majors; all the electives they take are filled with people who need a TU.

Wish students in general had more room for electives. A general problem in the curriculum.

Our intro course is capped at 35 and this is too big. Working with administration on this problem.

Would like to see some team teaching. For example in medical ethics, you could team teach with scientist and they could provide the latest in the scientific research. It wouldn’t require you to master the latest in each field. Can model for the students that they need to approach problems in the world from multiple perspectives.

The department would like more theologians to be teaching in FYS. And would also like to contribute to more Ethics Common Seminars. We have lots of people who are qualified, have backgrounds in ethics. Can’t do it because of other commitments to the common curriculum.

There might be a duplication of resources between DOT and SOT. Possibility of greater curricular cooperation between DOT and SOT. Could put undergrad and grad pastoral students together, free up room for doing other things.

Have a lot of temporary adjuncts teaching THEO 111. This happens for many reasons. Every year have new instructors teaching THEO 111 for the first time. We are well out of line of the 80/20 division, especially in the common curriculum.

*3) Leaving aside discipline specific knowledge, in what ways does your department/program best contribute to providing our students with a liberal education for their lives beyond college, as informed and engaged citizens, productive employees, ethical beings, etc.?*

The kinds of questions we ask them to address. Have a conversation with someone about a particular issue, how does that person have a different perspective. Have good pedagogical techniques throughout our courses, meet to discuss pedagogy with our colleagues.

Approach theology as a way of viewing the world – it is inherently integrating. Theology is a natural place for showing what the liberal arts tradition does: promotes a way of viewing the world that integrates all of its elements.

Try to get students to deal with perspectives that are different form their own in a respectful manner. Encourage a plurality of views as part of our pedagogical techniques.

Much more of a liberal arts approach than found in many other Catholic circles. Very open about questioning, encouraging students to question, research the question and recognize the value of different perspectives. These are built into our learning goals for
THEO 111 and TU.

In both THEO 111 and TU have critical thought as a goal, explore different perspectives as goals, and knowledge of the Benedictine tradition as goal. Students assume 111 will be an indoctrination course and it isn’t. Built on a liberal arts model, emphasizing critical reading and critical thinking.

*4) Are there ways in which you would like to see your department/program contribute to liberal education that so far it has not been able to*?

Would like to see a new core that would pull us out of our silos.

More team teaching. Helping our students see that they need to approach world from plurality of perspectives.

Would like our department to contribute more to ECS and FYS.

More systematic integration with LES, FYS sessions – talk about Benedictine values, etc.

Be more accessible to other departments.

Theology department is well placed to address some of the diversity issues that have come up recently.