History of Religious Studies at Virginia Tech

The collection of historical documents available below will give you a sense of the richness of the history of the teaching of classes in Religion/Religious Studies at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. The documents presented here overlap at some points and contradict each other at other points—more than most historical documents do! These reports reflect the changing administrative contexts in which the teaching of Religion/Religious Studies has taken place continuously for the past 50 years.

PREHISTORY OF THE PHILOSOPHY (AND RELIGION) DEPARTMENT
by Harlan B. Miller

NOTES ON THE FOUNDING OF THE DEPARTMENT
by Edward L. Long

EXCERPTS FROM A 1957 LETTER
by Edward L. Long

SOME NOTES ON THE GENESIS OF THE DEPARTMENT
by Ellison A. Smith

NOTES ON THE BEGINNING OF THE PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION PROGRAMS AT VPI&SU
by Norman L. Grover

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION HISTORY
by Charles A. Kennedy

AUGUST 14, 2001 LETTER TO THE RELIGIOUS STUDIES FACULTY
by Elizabeth Struthers Malbon

NOTES ON THE FOUNDING OF THE DEPARTMENT
by Edward L. Long

EXCERPTS FROM A 1957 LETTER
by Edward L. Long

SOME NOTES ON THE GENESIS OF THE DEPARTMENT
by Ellison A. Smith

NOTES ON THE BEGINNING OF THE PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION PROGRAMS AT VPI&SU
by Norman L. Grover

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION HISTORY
by Charles A. Kennedy

AUGUST 14, 2001 LETTER TO THE RELIGIOUS STUDIES FACULTY
by Elizabeth Struthers Malbon
PRE-HISTORY OF THE PHILOSOPHY (AND RELIGION) DEPARTMENT

Program History
PRE-HISTORY OF THE PHILOSOPHY (AND RELIGION) DEPARTMENT
by Harlan B. Miller

At the very beginning, 1872, a course in “moral philosophy” was offered at Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College. It was required for both the farmer and mechanic programs and was taught by President Minor. In the terminology of the Nineteenth Century, moral philosophy, covering territory now assigned to the Departments of Political Science, Economics, Sociology, Psychology, and perhaps others as well, was contrasted with natural philosophy, i.e., the physical sciences. The first listing of the moral philosophy course specifically mentions political economy, psychology, and ethics.

A few years later, in the 1880s, the moral (or “moral and mental”) philosophy course is listed with English and includes some logic. In 1891 logic drops from the catalogue, but the 1899 catalogue of Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College and Polytechnic Institute shows no ethics, no logic, no philosophy of any kind. From 1889 through 1950 philosophy is absent from the Blacksburg campus, except for a course in logic which appears in 1916 in the Rhetoric Department, moves with rhetoric into the English Department, but disappears after 1920.

Little concrete evidence remains of the content of philosophy classes in the early period. The present departments of Philosophy and of Religion trace their origins to 1950. In that year a student survey showed support for the addition of elective courses in “religion, philosophy, and ethics.”
NOTES ON THE FOUNDING OF THE DEPARTMENT

Program History

NOTES ON THE FOUNDING OF THE DEPARTMENT
by Edward L. Long

Dr. Edward Leffray Long, Jr., was hired during the month of July, 1956, to begin work in September of that year, teaching one philosophy course each quarter. This assignment was considered a four-month appointment and carried the title of Part-time Associate Professor of Philosophy and Ethics. The appointment was listed in the state budget as a position in Business Administration, and Dr. Long reported to Professor T. W. Knode, chairman of the Business Administration department—the department that at the time also did the teaching of history, political science, and public administration. Classes were taught in old Commerce Hall that stood on the north side of the Mall just a few hundred yards in from Main Street.

The title for the position was intended to indicate that value concerns would be a central part of the program while at the same time avoiding the many problems that would have arisen trying to introduce courses in religion under state funding. Three courses were introduced: Phil 301, an introductory ethics course primarily philosophical in nature; Phil 302, a course dealing with epistemology and metaphysics; and Phil 401, a discussion of the history, methodology, and professional ethics of the sciences. The first two were open to students above the freshman level, and the last to students above the sophomore level.

Dr. Long had a Bachelor of Civil Engineering degree from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and had taught physics there briefly before entering Union Theological Seminary in New York to study theology. He was an ordained Presbyterian minister and had continued, after earning his Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1948, to work on a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Philosophy of Religion and Ethics under the joint program of Union Seminary and Columbia University. He had this degree in hand before coming to VPI and had published two books.

In 1950-51 he was a graduate assistant in Christian ethics at Union. Dr. Long was hired simultaneously with his appointment at Tech as Minister to Students at the Blacksburg Presbyterian Church, a position involving a major part of his time and providing the major part of his remuneration. He was active during the initial two and one-quarter years both as a classpreacher (e.g., attending meetings of the Blackburn Memorial Association) as well as a faculty member.

The interest and enrollment in the three courses grew steadily from an average class size of between fifteen to twenty students (with no class smaller than eight) to an average class size of around thirty-five. Having that the Danforth Foundation had a regular program to aid in the establishing of Departments of Religion, an application was submitted in the winter of 1954 for its help in the expansion of the work. It was proposed to add three additional courses in philosophy with state funds and to add six courses in religion with funds from the Danforth Foundation. It was also proposed to establish a separate department responsible directly to the Dean of Applied and Liberal Studies and Administration. The funds from the Danforth Foundation were administered through the VPI Educational Foundation rather than through the state budget. Dr. Long getting two checks and being ineligible for the state pension plan.

The application to the Danforth Foundation was successful, though with this effort was received sufficiently late in the 1953-54 school year to make it wise to defer the beginning of the new program to the second quarter of the 1954-55 school year so that adequate planning could be done and notice of the new offerings given in ample time for student scheduling. In January of 1955, at the beginning of the winter quarter, Dr. Long became Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Philosophy and Religion and moved into an office on the third floor of Commerce Hall.

A new curriculum was introduced at this time. To the three courses already being offered in philosophy, the following courses were added: a two-quarter course in the History of Philosophy (Phil 311-312) and a course in the Philosophy of Religion. The course in the Philosophy of Religion was the introduction to the major courses, Biblical Literature: Rel 301, Religious Institutions in Western Culture: Rel 302, Religious Ideas in Western Thought: Rel 303, Religion in American Life, and Rel 304, World Religion. The course on Religion in American Life was also delayed in actually being offered. The work of the new department grew steadily, partly because some of the divisions of the school added an elective in philosophy (not in religion) to their standard programs, significantly because with the new locus of the department students from all parts of the school were attracted in more representative numbers, and also because it was normal to have increases in enrollments as courses were offered at more times in the schedule each week. Fundamentals of Philosophy had to be offered in multiple sections very soon after founding the new department, and in the winter of 1957 the services of a part-time instructor were needed to help with the instructional load, which had grown to about 120 students in six sections (five courses). One of the interesting aspects of the work of the department was the number of faculty members in all parts of the school who wished to audit. Dr. Long had about thirty such auditors in the first three years of his teaching. The part-time instruction was done by Orin Magli, a retired YM C.A. secretary who had begun his career at Tech before going to China for many years with the Y and who had just moved back into Blacksburg to retire.

In the spring of 1956, facing the prospect that the Danforth Foundation grant would run out at the end of the 1956-57 school year, Dr. Long and Dr. Newman sought to secure funding for the Department. The state budget could be expected to support the work in philosophy, but the work in religion had to be funded in other ways. It was decided to fund a two-man department. Several unsuccessful feelers were made to a number of foundations, and finally a proposal was drawn up for submission to the Old Dominion Foundation, of which Paul Mellon was the founder and benefactor. Mr. Paul Mellon gave the money personally, rather than through the Old Dominion Foundation, in June of 1956 and thus assured the future of the department beyond June of 1957.

The year 1956-57 was devoted to the search for a second member of the Department. Dr. Guy Hammond, a graduate student at Vanderbilt University, was selected to join the faculty. Meanwhile, Dr. Long was approached by Oberlin College to consider taking a position there as Associate Professor of Religion, and in April he made the decision to leave VPI.
Without knowing your local situation it is hard to imagine what aspects of our experience would be most helpful to you there. Here in the south we have had no problems whatever with respect to the question of the academic status of religion. We have had some resistance on the part of a very small segment of the engineering school to liberalize the electives for engineers, but curiously enough the department which provides the most vocal criticism sends us the most students. We have found it important to keep the academic requirements of the work reasonably severe in order to discourage the poor students from trying the courses for easy credit. We have deemed it almost essential to keep the courses as junior and senior electives not only because the upper classes have room in the schedule for them but because in general it requires maturity to successfully pursue the work. The fact that the Professor has studied engineering and is a member of professional engineering societies as well as Sigma Xi has helped, but I do not think this has been a determinative factor nor nearly as important as the fact that I have become known in town, originally in the church where I did a good amount of the Sunday preaching. I have had about thirty faculty auditors in my classes in the past three years and this too has helped to arouse interest. The interest and concern of course advisors in the work is probably as much a clue to the success of the undertaking as any other factor.

You may discover, as we have, that you can plan no sequence courses since student programs are so rigidly required and set as to make their election of courses more dependent on their free hours than upon their interest in a particular aspect of either philosophy or religion. Therefore, each course I teach has been a thought unit in itself and required no prerequisites. I have made a full year's credit in science a prerequisite for the course in the philosophy of science, but this is not a departmental prerequisite and serves only to exclude non-science majors who cannot profit from the course in the form it is given.
Program History

SOME NOTES ON THE GENESIS OF THE DEPARTMENT

by Ellison A. Smyth

Dr. Elton Trueblood gave the annual Y.M.C.A. Religious Emphasis addresses during the session of 1950-51. His emphasis on the need of technically trained students to have some instruction in the area of ethics was sewed in fertile soil. In April, 1951, the Rev. Robert Buford, Presbyterian minister to students left for other work. The President of V.P.I., Dr. Walter Newman was a member of the Blacksburg Presbyterian Church (later Deacon and Elder). Prof. Paul Dyck was chairman of the Student Work Committee at the Church. Newman and Dyck both had liberal arts backgrounds. Smyth, pastor of the church and a graduate of V.P.I. in Electrical Engineering (though later making up for his deficiency in liberal arts), was keenly aware of the imbalance in a purely technical education.

The confluence of these factors led to the beginning of the Department of Philosophy and Religion at V.P.I.: the stimulus of Trueblood’s emphasis, the need of replacing the Presbyterian minister to students position with a very tight financial church budget, Newman’s desire to find a way to test the political and academic waters by offering a few courses in the area of ethics in Virginia’s Land Grant College, and the decision of Prof. Paul Dyck and the pastor of the Presbyterian Church to offer a simple plan. Dyck and Smyth met with Newman and suggested that the church secure a fully qualified and mutually acceptable man to give half-time to introducing courses in ethics at V.P.I., and half-time to directing the Presbyterian student work program—the college and the church to share equally in the expense. [Editor’s note: See other accounts; this was apparently a quarter-time college/three-quarters-time church appointment.]

The first three qualified men contacted by Smyth turned down the proposition. At the meeting of the Presbyterian Educational Association in July 1951, Smyth was given the name of Dr. Edward LeRoy Long, Jr., who had just finished his Ph.D. at Columbia University and his B.D. at Union Seminary, New York. Smyth had read his book Science and Religion and was impressed with his ability. Interviews with Dr. Long resulted in calls from the church and V.P.I. and the beginning of his service here on September 1, 1951. Long continued as pastor in charge of student work until January 1, 1955, when he became the full-time head of the Department of Philosophy and Religion. He held that position until December 1, 1957, when he left for Oberlin College. [Editor’s Note: This does not match Long’s version; he stated that he made the decision to leave Tech in April 1957 and left at the end of the summer.]

Event Calendar

Seminars and Cultural Film Series: Culture Vultures (6:30 – 8:30 PM, Physic Hall) and Ten Minutes from Home (7:30 PM, Physic Hall) Series, in which a faculty member introduces one of their favorite films and talks about how it interacts with their own research and teaching. For our first film in the series, Prof. Emily Shulman will introduce the fim Zatoichi (1962) and talk about how this film influenced her research on the blind and martial artists in ancient China.

The Endeavors of Joan of Arc: Machinations and Creation of the Wire Husk Apr 6, 8:00 PM, 7:30 PM. Prof. Matthew Lillie, associate professor of history in the Dept. of Religion & Culture, will host this convivial and engaging performance that evening.

We all “know” something about the Middle Ages and perhaps even a little about Joan of Arc, the French heroine who brought down the English from the Kingdom of France! This tale has been retold in many forms, from popular folk tales and personal legends of Joan of Arc, to the passion of the nation of France, as well as the way it has been told to the masses and to the masses. Joan of Arc is the story of a woman who has been used in the modern world.

Awards Ceremony: The Beautiful and the Possible Apr 7, 7:30 PM. JoieTC student, Professor of English and Director of International Studies, will host the awards ceremony and thank the students, staff, and faculty for their contributions to the college and community.

Program History

Contact Us

Department of Religion and Culture
Lake Hall 112, Virginia Tech (540) 231-8461
Email: tcd@vt.edu

Chair, Department of Religion and Culture

Prof. Brian McRitchie (540) 231-8461 Email: tcd@vt.edu
NOTES ON THE BEGINNING OF THE PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION PROGRAMS AT VPI&SU

Program History

NOTES ON THE BEGINNING OF THE PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION PROGRAMS AT VPI&SU

by Norman L. Grove

In 1950 (may have been 1949-or even the first months of '51) Dr. Eillson A. Smyth, Jr., approached the President of VPI, Walter S. Newman, about bringing in a qualified scholar to introduce courses in the study of religion and ethics at Virginia Tech. Dr. Smyth was a native of Blacksburgh, son of the biologist who was the Dean of the College at a time when there was only one dean and an engineering graduate of VPI, who had gone into the ministry and recently returned to his home town as pastor of the Blacksburgh Presbyterian Church, of which Dr. Newman was a member and ruling elder. President Newman made informal inquiries about the prospects of initiating such courses. Because of the political sensitivity of any recognition of basic sciences even, let alone humanities, as instructional programs at VPI other than those reserved to the University of Virginia, it was clear that the Governor would not risk officially approving such course offerings as Dr. Newman envisioned. He saw these courses as so important to provide, however, that he took the risk of moving ahead to begin them on a small scale immediately and interviewed candidates to commence that work.

Dr. Edward Leroy Long, Jr., was hired to begin September 1, 1951, on a one-quarter time basis, teaching one philosophy course each quarter. Dr. Long had just finished his Ph.D. at Columbia University, where he had been a graduate assistant to Reinhold Niebuhr. He had an engineering degree from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute where he had been an instructor in physics, leaving to enter Union Theological Seminary in New York. At VPI he designed and taught three philosophy courses at the start; an introductory epistemology and metaphysics course, an introductory ethics course, and a philosophy of science course at the senior and graduate level. All three of these courses included some attention to the nature of religious claims--to knowledge about reality and about moral duties and goals--and to the relationship of science and religion. Dr. Long was hired simultaneously by the Presbyterian Church to conduct to the denomination's campus ministry as the major portion of his employment while initiating and developing the teaching at VPI on a quarter-time basis.

At the beginning of the Winter Quarter, January 1, 1955, Dr. Long was put on a full-time basis on the VPI faculty, and the first courses in the study of religion were added to the offerings. Up to that time he and his philosophy courses had been under the Department of Business Administration--as were also the faculty and courses in history, political science, and public administration. What later would be divided into the College of Business was at this time called the School of Applied Sciences and Business Administration with Dr. G. Bokes Johnston as Dean. Now a one-person department of Philosophy and Religion was established with a separate list of courses in each of these disciplines and Dr. Long's teaching time equally divided between these two course lists. Half of his salary, for the philosophy teaching, was on the state payroll and half of it, for the religion courses, was paid by a grant from the Danforth Foundation for that purpose. When Danforth funds ran out, the arrangement was continued through a non-renewable grant from Paul Mellon.

By the 1956-57 academic year there were six quarters of philosophy courses and six quarters of religion courses listed and taught each year. Second sections of two of these were added by Dr. Long teaching five sections per quarter instead of four and the part-time addition of Orrin Magill to teach one section per quarter. Magill was a retired YMCA secretary who had begun his career at Tech in 1911 before going to China in 1913 where he served for over 25 years with the Y. Permission to expand to two second sections in 1957-58 and the offering of some courses in more than one quarter. Addition of further new courses to add to both course programs at VPI&SU enabled Dr. Long to teach one section per quarter. Magill was hired to begin them on a small scale immediately and to continue that work.

In 1959 (may have been '49-or even the first months of '51) Dr. Charles Foshee, with a Duke Ph.D. in religion, to teach half-time at VPI and half-time at Radford College in 1958-59 enabled further expansion of sections and quarters offered for the courses and the first addition of new courses, one each in philosophy and religion. Dr. Foshee moved to full-time at Radford in 1969-60, and Dr. Palmer G. Talbott, Jr., a Duke Ph.D. in philosophy, was hired to teach in the VPI department. This enabled the addition of further new courses to add to both course lists. That continued and more extensive revisions of the course lists were undertaken after the addition of William H. Williams, a Princeton philosopher, in 1964-65.
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION HISTORY

Program History

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION HISTORY
by Charles A. Kennedy

The department of philosophy and religion may be the only department in the College that was formed as the result of a student survey. In the fall of 1950, spurred on by Paul Deming (for whom Deming Hall is named), Rydal Bailey, 51, of the YMCA at Tech, conducted a survey to find out how much student interest there was in having elective courses in religion, philosophy, and ethics added to the curriculum. With the favorable results in hand, they met with President Newman in the spring of 1951 to request his assistance in adding such courses.

Another factor that contributed to the genesis of the department was the appearance of nationally recognized leaders in religion who came to speak as the campus in the YMCA Religious Emphasis Week. Among those who came in 1950 was the Reverend Ernest Leob, deacon of Church, Episcopal, Philadelphia. In the Virginia Tech Tech for January 26, 1950, p.1, it is quoted: “in some schools today religion departments have already been installed and they are important in helping man discover himself, and his part in the universe.” A group at the Blackstone Presbyterian Church decided to implement this program. The minister, Elzin Smyth, a Tech graduate in electrical engineering, and Paul Dyck, professor of physical education and chairman of the Student Work Committee of the church, were looking for a replacement for Robert Blufford, the Presbyterian minister to students. In consultation with President Newman, who was over both a dean and in that church, plans were made to solve the church’s and the university’s needs in a way that would avoid the church-state issue.

Walter Newman had some misgivings about starting courses in religion in a state institution, and so, the story goes, he went to Governor Stanley in Richmond to test the waters. The governor leaned back in his chair and stared at the ceiling, said, “If you ask me, I think it’s a good idea.” So it was agreed that Newman should begin.

The arrangements Newman made seem almost Byzantine in their complexity. The Blackstone Presbyterian Church would hire a student to part-time pastorate while the university would hire the same person as part-time associate professor of philosophy and ethics. For the purposes of reporting his position to the state, the assignment was carried as a position in business administration. The arrangement was later strengthened by the doubling of the department’s faculty, the hiring of a philosopher, Roger Rosenkrantz, to do religion only, as was Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, to teach philosophy only.

Newman made an attempt to teach history, ethics, and the philosophy of religion. Two years later he was heard to exclaim, “How can I possibly do such a job?”

In the fall of 1951, to teach one course in philosophy, Deuteronomy 10:18, was hired in a joint appointment with the Center for Programs in the Humanities. This was the first indication of the department’s growth, but so far as was known at the time, the department was only philosophy and religion as disciplines were developing in divergent ways, a situation reflected in the subdivision of departmental offerings. This shift resulted in the hiring of a philosopher, Roger Rosenkrantz, to teach philosophy only, as was Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, to teach philosophy only.

In 1954, a grant proposal was successfully submitted to the Danforth Foundation to support the department. Although Professor Long began teaching full-time, he was still paid with two checks: one from the state for his philosophy courses, and one from the Educational Foundation for his religion courses. Throughout this whole period Long was ineligible for state personnel benefits, as technically he was a half-time employee. The new department was inaugurated in January 1955, with an office on the third floor of Maynor Hall (a faculty office).

Student enrolments increased as the number of courses offered grew and it was evident within a year that additional staffing would be needed. Ornith Malig, a YMCA Secretary who had begun his career at Tech before going to China as a missionary, had returned to Blacksburg to retire. In the winter of 1957 he was hired as a part-time instructor. (Malig would stay on in Blacksburg to serve on the Montgomery County Board of Supervisors into his eighties.)

With the Danforth grant about to expire, new funds were sought from the Old Dominion Foundation to insure a two-man department. In the end, Paul Melton donated the funds personally rather than through his foundation, and the department had a new lease on life.

1956-67 was a momentous year for the department. Long had no sooner hired Guy B. Hammond, a graduate student at Vanderbilt, to be the second member of the department, when Long himself accepted an invitation to move to Oberlin College. His replacement was Norman L. Grover, a recent Yale graduate who had been teaching at Holmes College. Both men were brought in as full-time professors of philosophy and religion and were so listed on the state records. This was Long’s farewell gift to the department. It would no longer be necessary to be paid with two checks or to be eligible to personnel benefits.

The fall of 1957 saw the new department take its place in the School of Applied Science and Business Administration under Dean G. Burke Johnstone. The following year Charles Foshee (Ph.D., Duke) was hired to teach part-time at Tech and part-time at Radford.

In 1959 Foshee moved to Radford full-time and Palmer Taltul, Jr., replaced him, chiefly to teach philosophy. The mid-60s saw a doubling of the department’s faculty. William Williams (1959) and Horner B. Miller (1960) were added to teach only philosophy courses. In 1967, with another grant from the Danforth Foundation, Charles A. Kennedy became the first full-time professor of religion. Kennedy was hired to teach Bible and Asian religions with an additional assignment to develop interdisciplinary courses. This list led to his becoming a visiting professor of the International Studies Program (1972-79).

As the College expanded in the ’70s, the faculty roster of the department grew. On the religion side Frank J. Neumann, Jr. (1970), was added to teach history of religion and phenomenology. Two years later Richard Edwards came to teach New Testament. In 1978 Emi McCoir was hired to replace Edwards and to develop religion and literature as a new area of interest. With his appointment the religion side of the department reached a peak; there were resident specialists in the major areas of religious study: philosophy of religion, theology, eastern religions, Bible, history of religions, and religion and literature.

By 1975 a significant change had occurred in the department. The philosophy side had seen a growth in students and faculty positions that was not repeated in the religion side. This resulted in the hiring of the first religion professor, Roger Rosenkrantz, to teach philosophy, and to replace Norman Grover, who had served as head since 1957. Although Rosenkrantz stayed only two years, the signs were clear that philosophy and religion as disciplines were developing in divergent ways, a situation reflected in the subdivision of departmental committees into philosophy and religion groups with inevitable differences. With the departure of Rosenkrantz, Guy Hammond emerged as the consensus candidate to become head in 1979. After the 1982 departmental review and recommendations of both the external consultants and the faculty, the department of religion became a separate unit in July 1985.

Hammond continued as head of religion, and both he and Grover opted to have their appointment changed to professor of religion, dropping the words "philosophy and." Kennedy and Neumann were already listed as religion only, as was Elizabeth Struthers Melton, hired in 1980 to replace (McCoir, who had replaced Edwards for one year) as New Testament. Frank Burch Brown, a specialist in Judaism and the arts, had been hired in 1979 as a joint appointment with the Center for Programs in the Humanities. All faculty in the department have taught or continued to teach in Humanities courses.

In 1985 Hammond returned to full-time teaching and research after eight years as head, and Kennedy was appointed the new head by Dean Henry Bauer.
AUGUST 14, 2001 LETTER TO THE RELIGIOUS STUDIES FACULTY

Program History
AUGUST 14, 2001 LETTER TO THE RELIGIOUS STUDIES FACULTY
by Elizabeth Struthers Malbon

Today is my last day as Director of the Religious Studies Program. As I have been anticipating the change in the Director of our program, I have been thinking back over the enormous changes I have seen in the institutional position of faculty in the area of religion during my twenty years at Virginia Tech. Permit me to rehearse just a bit of that history with you—so we will share some of my knowledge of our roots.

I first came to Virginia Tech in 1980, as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religion (housed in Henderson Hall, except that my office was in "Tech Mote"). The Department of Philosophy and Religion represented a marriage standing between the two fields. When I was promoted to Associate Professor in 1985, it was as a member of the Department of Religion (housed in Patton Hall). For a number of years I told people that Philosophy and Religion were divorced and lived happily ever after! In 1992, when I was promoted to Full Professor, we were still the Department of Religion, but that came to an end with the retirement of the chair, Chuck Kennedy in 1994, a time of severe financial crisis for the university. At that time the religion faculty were told (by an acting Dean of Arts and Sciences) that, in a move to save administrative costs, the Religion Department would be "merged" with the Center for Programs in the Humanities. When I asked what this new unit would be called I was told, "The Center for Programs in the Humanities." I argued vigorously against this merger with the Provost (Fred Carlisle), and the plans were put on hold until the Dean of Arts of Sciences position was filled. From the new Dean, Bob Bates, I learned that in the next year all the "small units" in the College of Arts and Sciences would be working to form a new combined unit. I said, "Well wait for that," and we were changed from a Department (with a Chair) to a free-standing Program (with a Coordinator, me) for one year. Not much later, when Joyce Williams-Green, newly appointed to head Black Studies, observed to the new Dean that all the programs stated for union that were headed by women had "coordinators" and all the programs that were headed by men had "directors," I saw all became directors immediately!

When Kennedy retired in 1994 we had six fulltime faculty in Religion, plus one joint appointee with Humanities, and a fulltime secretary. We went to a halftime secretary for 1994-95, and no secretary after that. We dropped from six to five to four to three—faculty—with retirements and departures during times of a hiring freeze—before stabilizing at four again with the coming of Brian Britt in 1996.

Thus the seven years during which I have been Director of the Religious Studies Program (1994-2001) have seen impressive changes. What has not changed is our commitment to excellence. That is part of our past that we can carry proudly into our future. While the number of faculty and the level of institutional support have decreased, the research and publication records of our faculty have increased! That is a part of our present that we can carry further in our future.

As I take leave of the position of Director of Religious Studies, few of the externals are the same as when I started. Since 1994 our name has changed, our status within the college and university has changed, but one (me) of our faculty changed, our offices have moved, even our computers have moved from BIMMs to Macs. What has remained is our commitment to bring the best teachers and scholars we can be, good citizens of the university and our department, and just plain decent human beings to each other as colleagues. May it ever be so.

Best wishes to all, and especially to Brian as he becomes our new Director.

Peace.

\[\text{Event Calendar}\]

\[\text{Religion and Culture} \]

Contact Us
Department of Religion and Culture
Lane Hall 112, Virginia Tech (2227)
(540) 231-6461
Email: jar@vt.edu

Chair, Department of Religion and Culture
Prof. Brian Britt
Lane Hall 112
(540) 231-6461
Email: jar@vt.edu