

Social and Religious Studies: a case study in curriculum development

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Abstract

The article illustrates how a department faced a crisis and overcame a serious problem. A small enrolment of students for Religious Studies during nineteen years meant that the program, which held no prospects of numbers increasing markedly, was not viable and should be terminated. Action was taken to change the curriculum so that prospective students could see vocational opportunities offered by the program. What had been a simple diploma program in Religious Studies became a degree program in Social and Religious Studies offering a pathway to welfare and teaching employment, as well as pastoral work. In the five years after the curriculum change began, numbers rose from about twenty to ninety-one, and the program was in good health.

Key words: precarious, impending doom, viable, Grade 12 school leaver students, curriculum with a broader base, curriculum refinement, less cumbersome

Introduction

Divine Word University developed from a high school in 1967 to an Institute incorporated by an Act of Parliament in 1980, then to University status by an Act of Parliament in 1996. (Czuba, 2004, p. 7) The first class of students graduated in 1982 in Business Studies and Communication Arts. In 1984 a Diploma in Religious Studies was introduced and in 1986 a Certificate in Christian Education. (Program Handbook 2008, p. 7) Religious Studies was present in the pioneering days of Divine Word, and by the end of the year 2008, the Department in which Religious Studies was located had a history of twenty-five years upon which to reflect, a significant period of time.

Several departments have established themselves solidly and very quickly at Divine Word University, while others have not had a primrose path to success. This study will show that the position of the Religious Studies Department was parlous for many years and that it had to earn the right to exist as an equal amongst the other Departments. It was through the development of its curriculum that it attracted students and sought to win respect. This case study will examine the development of the curriculum in three stages, viz. from 1985-2004, 2005-07, 2008-09.

Curriculum development

From about 1950 the study of curriculum development grew and become important in many countries, and theory and experimentation brought to light the complexity involved in curriculum development, (Marsh, 1986, p. 34) which was apparent in the models proposed by writers such as Ralph Tyler, Lawrence Stenhouse, Hilda Taba, Decker Walker, Malcolm Skilbek and Robert Stake. In the curriculum development outlined in this case study, elements of several of the models of the above-mentioned writers appear. Consider Tyler's model, influential for several decades since the 1970s, (Marsh, 1986, p. 62) which rested on four questions:

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
 2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
 3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
 4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?
- (Stenhouse, 1975, p. 1)

These questions could be reformulated to provide the four elements of the Tyler model, viz., objectives, content, method and evaluation, (Brady, 1992, p. 69) elements that play a part in the story of the Divine Word Religious Studies curriculum, though not appearing in the neat succession outlined in this model. Another rational model, a modification of Tyler's model, was put forward by Hilda Taba, who included a diagnosis of the students' needs, (Print, 1993, p. 66) an element that was fundamental to the changes undertaken in the Religious Studies curriculum. Evaluation does not have one agreed-upon definition and approaches to it vary according to the definition (Brady, 1992, pp. 241-252). It played an important part in the process of designing a better curriculum.

Stage 1: The problem: A curriculum with minimal appeal

A course at a University will normally attract sufficient students to pay for the expenses incurred in its implementation. It must be viable. Religious Studies was faced with a problem of student numbers that is revealed in Table 1, which shows the annual Diploma graduation figure during the thirteen years from 1985 to 1997:

Table 1 Diploma in Religious Studies Student Graduates 1985-1997

1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
7	3	7	1	3	5	6
1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	
3	5	5	3	2	7	

Source: Religious Studies graduate file

The figures show that the numbers were never large, never reaching double figures in any one year. The failure to attract students in large numbers was necessarily a cause of concern, since it meant that the course was not viable in its current form. Accordingly, a decision was made in 1996 to allow the course to lapse for a period of time. The class that had enrolled in 1996 completed its studies in 1997, but there was no enrolment of new students in 1997, nor in 1998. At the beginning of 1999 the future of the Diploma course was still uncertain, but students were enrolled and a new phase in the history of the Department of Religious Studies began.

Father Jürgen Ommerborn SVD and two Marist Brothers, Des Murphy and Julian Quinlan, provided leadership in the Department between 1986 and 1997. Another Marist Brother, Bill McCarthy, assumed the role of Head of the Department in 1999. It seemed unlikely that there would be any improvement in the situation without some radical change to the course, but the incoming leader was new to the country of Papua New Guinea and needed time to adjust to the ways of the University and to a culture very different from the western society from which he had come. Hence, there was no immediate change in the curriculum.

Purpose and content of the course

The purpose of a course is always important in providing the direction of the course and guidance for the choice of units. The 1999 Course Handbook stated the aim of the course as follows:

The general aim of this course is to provide the academic foundation and formation necessary for pastoral workers to be able to sustain local churches. The programme is also suitable for those involved in religious education, teachers in pastoral centres, or social and family welfare workers. (Divine Word University, 1999, p. 113)

The relationship of the units to the aim must be examined. The units (subjects) of the course were set out in this way:

Table 2 Course outline 1999

Subject	Course Code	Year	Sem	Hrs/Week
Certificate (Year 1)				
Hebrew Scriptures 1	RS111	1	1	3
Church History 1	RS112	1	1	3
Fundamental Theology: Revelation and Faith	RS113	1	1	3
God the Creator	RS114	1	1	3
Fundamental Moral Theology	RS115	1	1	3
Religious Education 1	RS116	1	1	3

Computer Applications – Word	RS117	1	1	2
<i>Total Hours</i>				20
Hebrew Scriptures 2	RS121	1	2	3
Church History 2	RS122	1	2	3
Christ, Redeemer of Humanity	RS123	1	2	3
Morality of Individual and Social Life	RS124	1	2	3
Pastoral Intent of Canon Law	RS125	1	2	3
Religious Education 2	RS126	1	2	3
Computer Applications – Excel	RS127	1	2	2
<i>Total Hours</i>				20
Diploma (Year 2)				
New Testament 1	RS211	2	1	3
Church and Sacrament	RS212	2	1	3
Morality of Religious Life	RS213	2	1	3
Parish Life	RS214	2	1	3
Liturgy	RS215	2	1	3
Counselling	RS216	2	1	3
<i>Total Hours</i>				18
New Testament 2	RS221	2	2	3
Church and Sacraments	RS222	2	2	3
Marriage and Family	RS223	2	2	3
Homiletics	RS224	2	2	3
Special Topics of Pastoral Work in PNG	RS225	2	2	3
Pastoral Psychology	RS226	2	2	3
Cultural Context of Theology in PNG	RS227	2	2	3
<i>Total Hours</i>				21

Source: Divine Word University, 1999, p. 118

The course units for the two years are religious in content with the exception of the computer studies in Year 1. Units such as Homiletics, Pastoral Intent of Canon Law, Parish Life and Morality of Religious Life might well be derived from a seminary handbook. The aim of the course indicates that the units would prepare students to become pastoral workers, teachers of religious education, teachers in pastoral centres and workers in social and family welfare areas. The course would fulfil its stated aim, and a student enrolling for the course would have been under no illusions about the type of employment to which the course would lead.

A new handbook was published in 2001. Changes apparent in Year 1 are the replacement of Pastoral Intent of Canon Law by Ecclesiology and Ecumenism and the addition of Special Minister of the Eucharist as well as Personal Development and Life Skills 1 and 2. In Year 2 the most notable changes were the addition of English Language and Literature 1 and 2 and Personal

Development and Life Skills 3 and 4, and the elimination of Morality of Religious Life and Cultural Context of Theology in PNG.

There was a slight broadening of the curriculum in 2001 with the addition of units in English and Personal Development, but the nature of the curriculum was unmistakable. It was designed to meet the needs of those who wanted a religious formation and who would seek employment involving religion.

For six years the curricula of 1999 and 2001 were followed. Was there any increase in numbers which would warrant an optimistic outlook concerning the future of the Department? Table 3 provides the data which answers this question.

Table 3 Student numbers for the Diploma in Religious Studies

Year	Number of students			
	Year 1	Year 2	Total	Diploma Graduates
1999	6		6	
2000	7	4	11	4
2001	11	5	16	4
2002	14	9	23	8
2003	13	13	26	13
2004	7	13	20	13

Source: Student assessment results file 1999-2004

Table 3 shows that during the period from 1999-2004 the intake in Year 1 was never large although it did reach double figures in three of those years. There was a fall off in numbers each year at the end of Year 1 when a few students discontinued their studies for various reasons. Some who struggled to cope were advised to leave, others left for personal reasons, while a few were unable to pay fees. The gradual increase in numbers in the first five years gave rise to the hope that the increase would continue until the intake in Year 1 reached approximately 25, and so be on a par with the intake in other departments. But the slump in the intake in 2004 was a rude shock that dispelled any idea that such a situation would be achieved. There was no guarantee that the number would go on increasing year after year until a satisfactory figure was reached.

The precarious position of the Diploma in Religious Studies gave rise to the rumour that it might be phased out again, even though numbers since 1999 had surpassed those of previous years. Such thinking was fuelled by the University Council which passed a motion that reads as follows:

Motion 108.13.04

Council requests through the academic division that the Religious Studies Department conduct a survey of the country's needs and restructure the Department to meet those needs. (Religious Studies Staff Report, 30/11/04)

It was thought that a survey could be a massive task and could extend over a considerable time, but the request for restructuring was well within the capacity of the Religious Studies staff.

The Religious Studies Department had some justification for its existence, apart from the Diploma in Religious Studies, through the teaching of religious units in all other departments, but in September of 2004, it was decreed that 'ethics courses will replace the religious subjects that were traditionally offered.' (Czuba, 27/09/04) This meant that the need for teachers of religious studies units in these other departments was diminished and the move would further jeopardise the Department's existence. Furthermore, the position of the Department was made more problematic by the success of other departments. While the Religious Studies Department languished, the number of applications to enrol in other departments was soaring. The situation necessitated hard thinking and change if the Religious Studies Department was to justify its existence.

Evaluation

Not everyone was willing to adopt a defeatist attitude. Consequently, during 2004 the Religious Studies Department staff held meetings to discuss the situation, with the inclusion at two lengthy, intensive meetings of several members of the Divine Word General Administration and Kaindi Teachers College: Dr Mark Solon, Dr Alfred Tivinarlik, Dr Catherine Nongkas, Br Andrew Simpson. (Department Minutes 20/04/04, 18/06/04)

The first consideration was the type of student attracted to the Diploma. Significantly, members of women's religious congregations and a few young Marist Brothers enrolled each year, though from 1999 the latter usually stayed for one semester only. Primary school teachers were also significant amongst those who enrolled. With few exceptions the students in the Department belonged to the Catholic denomination. Some students who applied had a genuine interest in their personal religious development while teachers, especially, wished to improve their qualifications and their effectiveness in teaching religion in the classroom. Other applicants, particularly school leavers from Grade 12, wished to study at a tertiary level but were aware that they did not have the marks for acceptance in other departments. Competition for a place in several departments was- often fierce, whereas places were available in Religious Studies. On the whole the students who enrolled in Religious Studies were older and more mature than students entering other departments. One noticeable advantage in this situation was that the maturity of the students meant a serious approach to studies, and in the case of teachers in particular, an ability to organize themselves for study.

It had become evident that very few Grade 12 school leaver students were attracted to Religious Studies, a point made by members of the University Council. A consequence of the small number of Grade 12 school leavers was the lack of support in the form of HECAS scholarships in the first year at least, a substantial benefit when it came to paying fees. The point could not be

ignored. It was clear, moreover, that for any guarantee of a large intake each year, the Department should look to a larger intake of school leavers, and for that to happen, a curriculum with more appeal to them would have to be provided.

The second consideration concerned the curriculum and the employment of those who obtained a Diploma. It had become clear during the past five years that graduates with a Diploma in Religious Education often sought employment in pastoral situations, welfare organizations and schools. It was judged that students who were employed in schools received significant assistance for their particular work. At the same time they were clearly disadvantaged, e.g. students who were employed in Catholic schools were mainly confined to the teaching of religion and personal development and were not placed on the payroll by the Education Department. Their salary was paid by the school or the diocese, but not on the same scale as teachers on the government payroll.

A third consideration arose from evaluating the six weeks of work experience carried out by students at the end of Year 1. Staff members observed that those who did their work experience in welfare offices and later gained permanent employment in welfare offices were not adequately prepared by the Diploma for the tasks that they were sometimes asked to do, e.g. preparing people to go to court and counselling people in a variety of life situations.

Stage 2: A radical change: Religious Studies, Welfare, Education

The outcome of these meetings was the recognition that the curriculum was too narrow to have a wide appeal to youth and it did not provide adequate preparation for the workplace in which students were already finding employment. The decision was made to provide a curriculum with a broader base and to increase the length of the course.

As regards the new curriculum design, education in religion was still considered important. Papua New Guinea is a Christian country and a Christian University should provide a serious study of religion that would support the Christian mission. It was considered important that religious studies should be provided for those who valued their religion and sought further development at the tertiary level. The religious aim articulated in the handbooks of 1999 and 2001 could stand, but the overall aim should be more comprehensive.

Units of a welfare nature would be provided, since it had become apparent that some students who did work experience in welfare offices hoped to gain employment there at the end of their studies. While the religious units would be helpful to a person employed in such offices, units that were specifically oriented to welfare should be incorporated into the curriculum.

As for those who wished to engage in teaching, much debate was generated about the type of unit that should be offered in the curriculum. It was suggested that students were in need of a range of units to provide the content necessary

for teaching subjects in secondary schools such as English, history, geography. While science units such as, chemistry and physics were desirable, they were ruled out, since the facilities for teaching such units were not available at Divine Word University.

It was also suggested that several units in teaching methodology – the number four was mentioned - should be incorporated into the new curriculum so that students would emerge after four years with a qualification that equipped them to walk straight into a classroom. Hence, they could make immediate application for registration on the government payroll. Others argued that a teaching qualification such as a diploma in teaching at the secondary level should be pursued after the completion of their Arts degree and it should be separate from an Arts degree. Besides, not all students who pursued this degree would want to become teachers, e.g. welfare workers. The decision favoured a degree followed by a secondary teaching qualification pursued separately by those who wished it through a teaching diploma run at Divine Word or at the University of Goroka.

Besides the decision concerning the curriculum, a decision was also made to continue the program to the degree level. Students of Religious Studies had often asked for this development (Religious Studies Student Minutes 1999), and other departments were moving in this direction. A degree would be a further attraction to students. It was also clear that for adequate preparation of students for the type of employment envisaged, time was necessary, and that meant four years of study. Approval was given by the Academic Board to proceed with this step. (Academic Board Minutes 1/07/04)

Implementation of a new three-year program

The next question concerned the units that would have a place in the curriculum, and the name of the Department, since ‘Department of Religious Studies’ would be inadequate to describe the work of the Department and would be misleading. The units, planned with some haste due to the time requirements of the new handbook, were submitted to, and accepted by, the Arts Faculty and the Academic Board (‘in principle’). (Department Minutes 20/07/04) The units were set out as follows:

Table 4 Program Outline 2005

Code and Unit	Credit Points
Year One Semester One	
RS131 Hebrew Scriptures 1	8
RS132 Religious Education 1	8
RS133 General Psychology	8
RS134 English Language and Literature	8
IS111 Introduction to End-User Computing	8
Year One Semester 2	
RS141 New Testament 1	8
RS142 Religious Education 2	8

RS143 Counselling	8
RS144 English Language and Literature 2	8
IS112 Introduction to Word Processing	8
Year 2 Semester One	
RS231 Hebrew Scriptures 2	8
RS232 Church History 1	8
RS233 Church and Sacraments	8
RS234 Christian Ethics	8
RS235 Welfare Issues	8
Year 2 Semester Two	
RS241 New Testament 2	8
RS242 Church History 2	8
RS243 Liturgy	8
RS244 Social and Ethical Issues	8
IS105 Desktop Publishing	8
Year Three Semester One	
RS311 Gospel and Letters of John	10
RS312 World Religions	10
RS313 Old Testament and Healing (E)	10
PG203 History of Asia Pacific	8
PG204 South Pacific Literature	8
Year Three Semester Two	
RS321 Christology	10
RS322 Marriage and Family Issues	10
RS323 Poetry and Wisdom Literature	10
RS324 New Testament and Healing (E)	10
PG106 Colonial History	8
PG208 Contemporary Themes in Literature	8
Year Four Semester One	
RS411 Apocalyptic Literature	10
RS412 Social teachings of the Church	10
RS413 Revelation and Faith (E)	10
PG107 PNG Literature (E)	8
PG206 Research Methods	8
PG305 Post Colonial English Literature (E)	10
Year Four Semester Two	
RS421 Research Project	20
RS422 Pastoral Care of the Sick and Terminally Ill	10
RS423 Ecclesiology and Ecumenism (E)	10
PG207 Growth in Global History (E)	8
PG307 Issues in oral History (E)	10

Note: Changes to the program outline above may be necessary as the Degree program is phased in

Source: Divine Word University, 2005, pp. 12-13

Several differences stand out in the programs of 1999/2001 and 2005. The total number of lecture hours over the two semesters is one very obvious difference. In Years 1 and 2, according to the Handbooks of 1999/2001, there was a total of 79/89 hours as distinct from a total of 60 hours in 2005. The change from 79 to 89 hours in 1999 and 2001 was mainly due to the addition of 8 Personal Development units. Until 2005, each department was free to determine the number of hours necessary for its program, and to decide upon the number of hours accordingly. The decrease in the number of hours in 2005 was due to the decision of the University Administration that in each semester of Years 1 and 2 each year level would study 5 units, each with 3 hours of lectures per unit, making a total of 15 hours of lectures each week throughout the semester. It was further decreed that in Years 3 and 4, each year level would study 4 units in each semester, each with 3 hours of lectures, making a total of 12 hours each week throughout the semester and a total of 48 semester hours for the two years.

A second major difference between the programs of 1999/2001 and 2005 is the number of religious units offered. Whereas in the 1999/2001 Handbooks 24 religious units are listed in both Handbooks, the number for Years 1 and 2 in the 2005 Handbook is 11. In Years 3 and 4 the number of compulsory religious units is 7 with an additional 4 elective (E) units. The total number of compulsory units over 4 years is 18, a significant reduction from the 24 units in the previous two-year courses.

A third difference is the use of nine units from the PNG Studies Department. Due to a lack of time to develop its own units, the Department 'borrowed' the units. These units were history, English and research, units that would serve to prepare students for classroom teaching.

The change in the curriculum had to be reflected in the title of the Department, hence the name: 'Department of Religious Studies, Welfare, Education' (RSWE) Some debate followed regarding this name, as it was thought to be rather cumbersome, but for want of something better, the name was accepted.

The success of the curriculum change, dependent very much on the number of students who sought enrolment in the Department, is apparent in Table 5.

Table 5 Student numbers for the Degree in Arts (Religious Studies, Welfare, Education)

Year	Number of students					Degree Graduates
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total	
2005	17	4	5	1	27	1
2006	25	13	7	13	58	13
2007	24	24	12	13	73	13

Source: Student assessment file 2005-2007

The intake in Year 1 in these 3 years surpasses any intake since the inception of the course, reaching the desired number of 25 by 2006. Another obvious change is in the total number of students at the end of 4 years, with the rise in numbers to 73. The Department was at last viable, to judge by the numbers.

Stage 3: Consolidation and stability: Social and Religious Studies

The curriculum required refinement. The opportunity for further curriculum change occurred with the production of the new Handbook of 2008.

During the past three years, it had become clear that the religious affiliation of the students in Year 1 had changed. Whereas those who applied for enrolment until 2004 were, with few exceptions, Catholic, the catholicity of the new students could no longer be taken for granted. Students enrolling in Year 1 belonged to several denominations and this factor had to be taken into consideration in determining the religious units of the curriculum. For instance, the unit 'Church and Sacraments' was re-written to emphasize the sacraments that were common to mainline Churches.

Another pressing consideration was the necessity of some kind of balance to cater in a more equitable way for students who wished to enter the teaching and welfare services. The number of compulsory religious units in the curriculum had been reduced from 24 in Years 1 and 2 in 1999/2001 to eighteen in 2005 in Years 1-4, but still, the religious units numbered half the compulsory 36 units and the Department was still commonly referred to as 'Religious Studies.' Accordingly, it was decided that an equal number of units would be allocated to the 3 areas of religion, welfare and education, which meant 12 units to each field of study over the 4 years. The scalpel was brought to bear upon the body of the units in order to excise religious units which were much loved by the staff. But which religious units should be removed?

The unit 'Liturgy' was essentially based on the liturgy of the Catholic Church. It would be difficult to justify the unit in its present form if many of the students did not belong to the Catholic denomination. Hence Liturgy ceased to have a place in the curriculum. It was judged that World Religions, never popular with students, would go. Since there were seven Scripture units, Hebrew Scripture 2, New Testament 2 and Apocalyptic Literature were eliminated. A unit on Social and Ethical Issues was taught in Year 2, which meant that there was less need for Social Teachings of the Church, and this unit also disappeared.

The elimination of religious units provided space for the inclusion of more teaching and welfare units. The existing units with content for teaching were mainly history and English, which suggested the need for more variety. Moreover, seven of these units had been taken from Years 1 and 2 of the PNG Studies curriculum and were 8-credit point units; they were taught in Year 3 and 4 of RSWE, where units should be 10-credit point units. New units had to be designed by the RSWE Department to replace the PNG Studies units and they must have the required number of credit points. Thus, units in Geography

1 and 2, Statistics and Algebra, Western English Literature and Modern World History were introduced, mainly in Years 3 and 4. PNG History, taught in Communication Arts, was introduced into Year 2. Several curriculum documents for the secondary school units were examined, so that these new units were related to the secondary school units currently taught in PNG. Moreover, lecturers were available to take the units.

The welfare component of the curriculum was not neglected. Community Development and Practice and its sequel, Social Policies of Community Development, were included. In order to cater for the young people who would be the object of special concern in welfare offices, Youth Social Work was added. There was a question about PG206 Research Methods, which seemed a necessary preliminary study to the Research Project undertaken in the second semester by Year 4. But it was an eight-point unit and it was duly replaced by the newly designed RS416 Supervised Research Project. It had been found that most major research projects undertaken by Year 4 students were in the category of welfare, though a student might choose a topic from another field of study. There was also continuity from one semester to another in several units, e.g. General Psychology-Counselling, Community Development and Practice-Social Policies of Community Development, Supervised Research Project-Major Research Project.

As the new units were designed, they were discussed and formally approved by the Department staff. They were then submitted to the Faculty Board for further examination and approval. (Department Minutes 23/03/07, 29/05/07) Subsequently, the units were combined to form the Program Specification Document. Notification of the changes to the curriculum was then given to the Registrar and to the Academic Board. Since then, the only further notable change to these units has been the inclusion of a more detailed statement of assessment tasks requested by the Dean of Studies for the programs of all the departments. The new curriculum came into use in 2008.

The title of the Department came in for further consideration. (Department Minutes 23/03/07) The title 'Religious Studies, Welfare, Education' had proven to be too much of a mouthful since it came into use, and the Department continued to be referred to as 'Religious Studies,' shorter and easier to say, but no longer reflecting the true nature of the Department. So, from several names put forward, the title 'Social and Religious Studies' (SRS) was adopted as expressing the nature of the course and being less cumbersome than the previous title. (Arts Faculty Report, August 2007)

In each semester there would be units from the three fields of study with an equal number of units (12) in each field as shown in the following Table:

Table 6 Three fields of study

Education	Welfare	Religious Studies
RS134 English Language & Literature 1	RS133 General Psychology	RS131 Hebrew Scriptures 1
RS144 English Language & Literature 2	RS143 Counselling	RS141 New Testament 1
PG208 Contemporary Themes in Literature	RS244 Social & Ethical Issues	RS424 Prophecy and Poetry
RS415 Western English Literature	RS235 Welfare Issues	RS311 Gospel and Letters of John
RS425 Modern World History	RS245 Youth Social Work	RS414 Letters of Paul
CA125 PNG History	RS322 Marriage & Family Issues	RS132 Religious Education 1
RS316 Physical and Human Geography 1	PG303 Community Development Practice	RS142 Religious Education 2
RS326 Physical and Human Geography 2	PG309 Social Policies of Community Development	RS232 Church History 1
IS117 End-User Computing and Word Processing	RS422 Pastoral Care of the Sick and Terminally Ill	RS242 Church History 2
IS113 Introduction to Spread Sheet Management	RS416 Supervised Research Project	RS314 Church & Sacramental Life
IS105 Introduction to Desktop Publishing	RS421 Major Research Project (20 credit points)	RS321 Christology
RS236 Statistics and Algebra		RS234 Christian Ethics
12	12	12

Source: Lecturers' units file 2009; Department Minutes 23/03/07

In organising the units in each semester, units are taken from each field of study. In this way an integrated course is provided and development in each field of study is on-going throughout the four years. The units of the new curriculum were set out in the new Handbook as follows:

Table 7 Program Outline 2008 (Divine Word University, 2008, pp. 20-21)

Code and Unit	Credit Points
Year One Semester One	
RS131 Hebrew Scriptures 1	8
RS132 Religious Education 1	8
RS133 General Psychology	8
RS134 English Language and Literature	8
IS117 End-User Computing and Word Processing	8
Year One Semester 2	
RS141 New Testament 1	8
RS142 Religious Education 2	8
RS143 Counselling	8
RS144 English Language and Literature 2	8

IS113 Introduction to Spread Sheet Management 8

Year 2 Semester One

RS232 Church History 1 8

RS234 Christian Ethics 8

RS235 Welfare Issues 8

RS236 Statistics and Algebra 8

PG208 Contemporary Themes in Literature 8

Year 2 Semester Two

RS242 Church History 2 8

RS244 Social and Ethical Issues 8

RS245 Youth Social Work 8

CA125 PNG History 8

IS105 Desktop Publishing 8

Year Three Semester One

RS311 Gospel and Letters of John 10

RS314 Church & Sacramental Life 10

RS316 Physical and Human Geography 1 10

PG303 Community Development and Practice 10

Year Three Semester Two

RS321 Christology 10

RS322 Marriage and Family Issues 10

RS326 Physical and Human Geography 2 10

PG309 Social Policies of Community Development 10

Year Four Semester One

RS414 Letters of Paul 10

RS415 Western English Literature 10

RS416 Supervised Research Project 10

RS422 Pastoral Care of the Sick and Terminally Ill 10

Year Four Semester Two

RS421 Research Project 20

RS424 Prophecy and Poetry 10

RS425 Modern World History 10

Source: Divine Word University, 2005, pp. 12-13

The number of students continued to rise in 2008 and in the following year as Table 8 shows.

Table 8 Student numbers for the Degree in Social and Religious Studies

Year	Number of students					Degree Graduates
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total	
2008	24	22	20	14	80	14
2009	27	26	19	19	91	13

Source: Student assessment file 2008-2009

With 91 students enrolling in the Department in 2009, the course was solidly established. The constant work of planning since 2005 had borne fruit, and it seemed that the Department could look forward to the future with confidence instead of having a sense of impending doom that had prevailed in earlier times.

Conclusion

Complacency should never prevail in education. There is always room for improvement. In 2008 some Year 2 students requested a more specialized course in social welfare. The idea of establishing a Social Welfare Department has merit, and should be considered for development at some future date, perhaps earlier rather than later. In the meantime, the Social and Religious Department will work at consolidating the gains it has made, and continue to evaluate the curriculum to meet the needs of its students. Of particular importance will be the judgment of former students about the usefulness of the units in the curriculum. Employers, too, must be approached for their verdict on the course. At this point in time, only one full year after the implementation of the new curriculum, it is too early to carry out such a survey, but it must be done when the time is right.

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Student assessment file 2005-2007, Department of Social and Religious Studies.

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