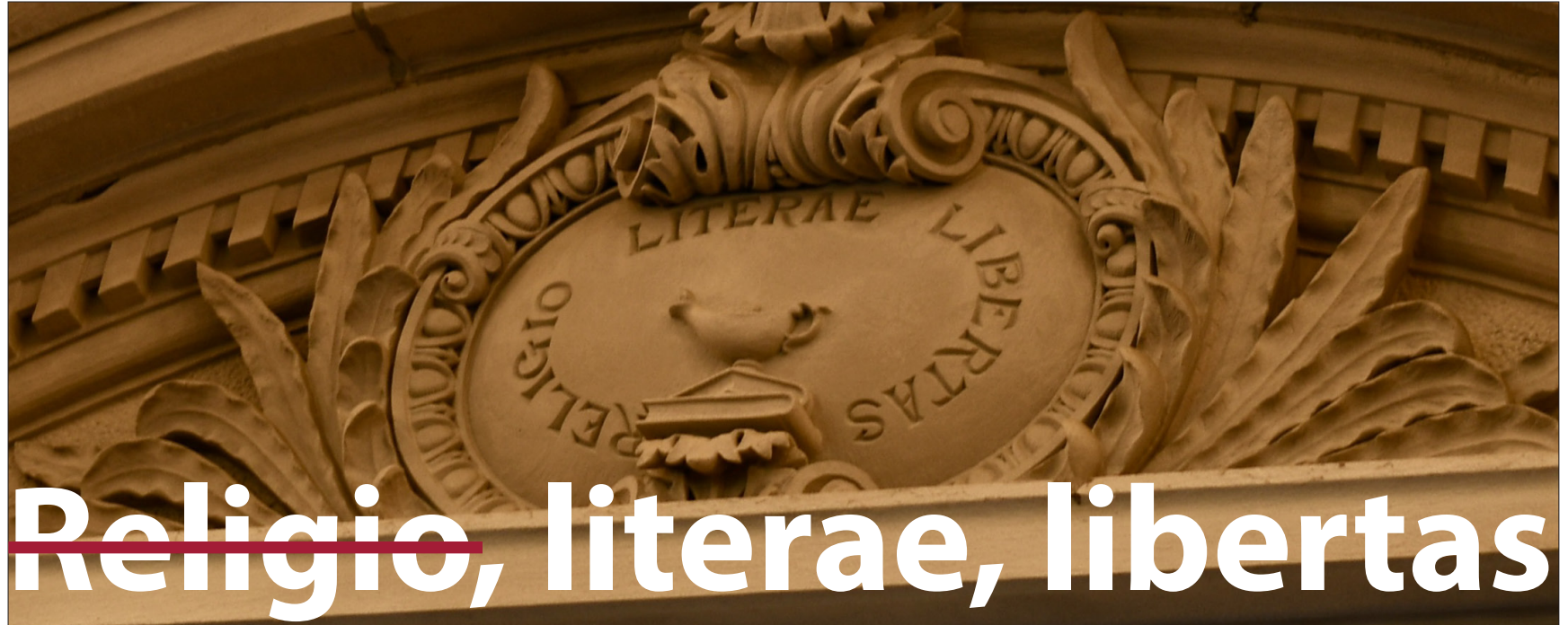


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Religio, literae, libertas

PHOTOGRAPHER | AIDAN STROMDAHL, ORACLE

After months of being in limbo, the religion department no longer exists at Hamline.

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In MAY 2019, members of the religion department were called into Dean Marcela Kostihova's office and were told that their department was being "sunset" — a term used to mean eliminated or discontinued. In the fall of 2020, the department was officially eliminated and realigned into the global studies department.

Mark Berkson, a professor in the religion department for 20 years, said that he looked for answers and a way to make a case for the continuance of the department, but the decision was deemed "non-negotiable" by Marcela Kostihova, the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts.

"Nobody asked for my opinion or my recommendation for anything," Berkson said. "There had never been a committee recommendation about this, no one had looked into it, there had been no review, it was simply an administrator making an announcement that a department, that has been a part of Hamline for a very long time, a well-regarded department, was simply being eliminated and merged into something else."

Kostihova said she did consult with faculty, even though she did not have to.

"If I was making changes to a program, then that's a process that has to go through a faculty committee, but administrative realignment is an administrative decision," Kostihova said.

However, some believe that the religion department should have a proper review with the combined input of students, faculty and staff.

"There's a program review going on, my hope would be that religion can be involved in that just like every other program and be reviewed in a fair and transparent way," said Nancy Victorin-Vangerud, the university's Chaplain and Director of the Wesley Center. "And if out of that, restructuring needs to happen, I want to support our academic leaders in being creative and adaptive."

According to Kostihova, the elimination and realignment

The Hamline seal sits over the doorway to the old Hamline library in Giddens Learning Center. Religio refers to religion, literae to literature and libertas to liberty and the liberal arts.

"We were founded with 'religio,' that was seen as essential in understanding the world in a higher education, collegiate level study," Victorin-Vangerud said. "'Religio' has been in our DNA as an area of study from our founding."

happened due to "the departure of several of our faculty," citing that there can be no one-professor departments, which the department would be with just Berkson, as well as "the reduction of the number of students who are seeking a major and minor."

As reported by Berkson, in spring 2021, there are 23 religion majors, 247 students currently enrolled in religion classes and all 4-credit courses are filled to capacity. While Berkson was the only full-time faculty member in the department for the past two years, he shares the load of the religion department in large part with visiting religion faculty Amanda Furiasse, adjunct and co-advisor for the Oracle Trevor Maine and Victorin-Vangerud.

The program was not granted permission to hire new full-time professors, despite Berkson requesting it with the retirement of professor Earl Schwartz and the leaving of professor Deanna Thompson.

With the loss of departmental status, there are concerns for autonomy, connections with other institutions and their departments, ability to hire faculty in the future and budgetary authority.

"The strength of a department, to the extent that the university remains committed to at least a partial departmental structure, is that it allows for independence, with focus, fortified by a budget," Schwartz said.

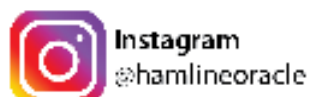
Kostihova has expressed that "we haven't trimmed the budgets, or taken any restricted or unrestricted funds from religion."

While the department no longer exists, the religion program itself remains, now under the global studies department.

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religion program,
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Our mission

To cover news, trends, events and entertainment relevant to Hamline undergraduate students. We strive to make our coverage accurately reflect the diverse communities that comprise the student population.

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Response to realignment

Students, past and present, respond to the realignment of the religion program.

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FROM DAY ONE of his Jewish ethics class, as a first-year, current senior Nick Cobian was hooked on religion. Cobian took the class on the recommendation of a friend and never would have expected that he would find himself studying it, along with communications, for the next four years.

"I think there are a lot of students that take these classes, just to see what they're about, because I think the entire topic relates to everybody's life in some capacity whether or not you are strictly religious or not," Cobian said.

Cobian is not the only student to find themselves unexpectedly studying religion.

"My first class was intro to religion with Mark Berkson and that was it, that sealed the deal, I took every class I could with this man," said Elaina Tueffel, who graduated in 2020 with degrees in religion and anthropology. "I don't know what I would have done without the religion department. I was able to go to conferences and go to other states and go to retreats, the religion department gave me more of a family and the anthro department gave me my career."

Hamline students and their families were proud of the department, and in 2019 they gained another when the religion program was recognized by the Bachelor's Degree Center for being one of the top 25 programs in the nation for religion, sitting at 16.

"I am first generation, so when I found that out, I told my dad and he loves to brag about me... and he was like, 'I'm also going to brag about that,'" said Estefania Jauregui,

a senior and double major in religion and history.

The first time students became aware that the department may face elimination was in the spring of 2020. In the fall 2020 semester, the religion department was officially "sunset," and the religion program was realigned under the global studies department.

"I think it really takes away any freedom that we have," Cobian said. "Especially putting it in the global studies department. I understand you can't put it in the biology department, but you might as well, because it waters it down just as much."

For the first 100 years of a religion program at Hamline it was partnered with philosophy, according to Dean Marcela Kostihova.

"To me, the biggest change with the shift is that religion went from a humanities to a social science," said Walker Brault, a 2019 graduate with degrees in religion and chemistry. "I think this brings an entirely separate view of religion into the conversation."

Students had not been made aware of this administrative change until recently.

"No one was consulted, none of the students, and the university runs because of the students," said Jauregui. "We pay and we weren't consulted on anything. I had to get an email from my professor and not the administration."

There is some doubt about how lack of interest could be a reason for the elimination and realignment of the department.

"I really don't know why religion would be one of the first ones to be targeted, if you see the numbers, religion was doing so good," Jauregui said. "Everyone kind of wants to take the classes. The classes that I'm in right now, they're all packed. They're like 20-30 students."

Cobian tried to look at this elimination

and alignment objectively and still finds himself at the conclusion that "none of it makes sense." Now that the religion program is no longer independent, their hiring power, which they are approved for by the administration, has gone away.

"With Hamline not hiring any new professors, there was a lack in courses," Tueffel said. "[Berkson] basically was the only professor, so he couldn't teach all of his courses, and then we got Amanda, so it was easier for him to teach. But with two professors in one department, they can't really keep up on all that."

This lack of independence also impacts who controls the budget and where it ultimately goes. Religion students are required to take a 1-credit colloquium class, and within that class students are provided meals.

"That's one of the most beneficial courses that the religion department offers for majors and minors," Tueffel said. "Granted we don't need the dinner, but we need the dinner. It makes such a difference. It also helps students who are adults living off campus paying for their own food."

According to Berkson, "colloquium is one of the ways that the department builds community." But since the budget is no longer their own, they will have to get permission for future use. This is just one of the many concerns students have about the future of the program, and students are still pushing for the department to be given a chance to make their case.

"Hamline should absolutely give the religion department back to itself," Tueffel said. "I understand they have to make money because they're a business, which is also a joke, but unless they're going to merge every single three different majors... it's not okay."



PHOTO| AIDAN STROMDAHL, ORACLE
Professor Mark Berkson and his students (top to bottom (L-R): Mark Berkson, Nicholas Cobian, Madalyn Hembre, Jaraide Dossavi-Alipoeh, Estefania Jauregui, Fatumo Mohamed) stand together knowing the religion program has been realigned into the Global Studies Department.

Times are a'changing for HUSC

Two new student congress resolutions have been made, changing role titles and fund bylaws.

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SINCE THE FALL SEMESTER of 2020, two major HUSC resolutions have been made. One of which changes the titles of president and vice president and the other to make rules and regulations to the Collaboration Fund.

The co-president resolution will be voted by students from March 2 to 4. If this passes, the titles will be referred to by large as “co-presidents,” starting with the rest of this semester.

In the co-president resolution, it breaks down the roles into internal and external presidents adhering to the responsibilities they each cover. The current “president” role will become the “external president” which applies to meetings they attend with the administration or trustee members, while the “vice president,” to be “internal president,” relates to all they do within general assemblies and other HUSC and student connections.

“I would describe it as making the titles of our executive team more equitable and to match with what our roles really are. Cece and I are more co-leaders than any sort of hierarchy. We have the same amount of responsibilities... so it's just to be more equitable in our titles,” said Kaia Ziegler, president of HUSC and co-author of the resolution.

Multiple HUSC members mentioned this would help both roles to be seen as equal which would encourage there to be an additional students in meetings with the Board of Trustees and administration, allowing for more student representation for the entire Hamline student body.

“What you want out of [this] is to have an equitable administration, so if we are [an] administration that says we want to have accessibility, transparency and equity, I think that falls into not only stipends, not only into time and opportunity and delegation of roles but also falls into titles and how they are perceived by people,” said Grace Ryan, former HUSC executive board member, current technology coordinator and public relations chair.

Another student organization on campus to operate with this co-president model is Dance Marathon. HUSC observed Dance Marathon when making this resolution as well as talking to past HUSC presidents and vice presidents, staff and advisors on campus.



PHOTO | COURTESY OF GRACE RYAN

Current vice president Cecelia Miller (L) and president Kaia Zeigler (R) have proposed change their HUSC positions to be co-presidents, pending the success of their resolution.

“I hope it demonstrates to the rest of the student body that HUSC is willing to grow and change when necessary ...[T]hat's what we have been aiming to do a lot this year and the past recent years,” said Raina Meyer, sponsor of the resolution and HUSC political affairs committee chair.

The other resolution makes regulations to one of HUSC's funds. HUSC has a number of different funding categories that each serve unique purposes: Contingency, Conference, Challenge and, the newest, Collaboration. The Collaboration Fund is not only for monetary support but also offers HUSC's help with advertising, support and volunteering.

“I wanted to introduce this bill because I think the distribution of HUSC funds directly impacts the student body since we are fully funded by the student fee,” said Cecelia Miller, HUSC vice president and co-author of fund resolution. “We want to make sure student money is going back to students in the best way possible as they

have entrusted us with the keeping and distributing of the funds they provide.”

Historically, some of the money from this fund has been used for events that HUSC partnered with or for research projects student's conduct that can benefit the whole student body. Due to COVID-19, creative ways of using such money are encouraged since in person events are more complicated.

“I hope that a lot more students apply. I think it is one of those under-utilized funds at this point with a lot of room for students to do a lot of good work. So really it is about making sure students know it exists and making sure that a lot of different people can use it for a lot of different things,” said Jessie Luévano, economic affairs chair.

If there are any questions or concerns about these resolutions, HUSC can be reached at husc@hamline.edu or at their website <https://www.husc.hamline.edu/>.

Religion

(continued from front)

“We were not, at this point, proposing any kind of reductions to the program, elimination of the study of religion, or the ability of students to do the major or minor,” Kostihova said. “I'm not willing to take the chance that because it's dwindling, and the number of faculty is shrinking, that it's not supported appropriately.”

There is some concern for other motivations behind the elimination of the department.

“My worst fear is if there's a suspicion or devaluation of religion, as an academic subject, because it's a controversial area,” Victorin-Vangerud said.

Schwartz has his own theories.

“The administration has been relatively frank about this with admissions concerns,” Schwartz said. “That placing that religious heritage too close to the front of what Hamline is about might discourage enrollment in certain potential sectors of what could be identified, unfortunately, as a market. It has to do less with identity and more with first impressions.”

Students and faculty can expect to see continued administrative changes to their departments in the future.

“It's not that religion is being targeted more or differently than any other program, there are a number of other programs that are in a similar situation, it's just that the faculty here are not necessarily as receptive to change as faculty in other areas,” Kostihova said.

Berkson's one request has been for a fair chance to fight for the existence of the department.

“What I won't accept is a decision being made without any faculty input, which completely denies the very idea of shared governance, which the institution claims to value,” Berkson said. “To me, it was a due process question, we were never given a process. My demand ever since has been ‘let us have a process.’”

Berkson also expressed a fear that if a lack of due process can happen to them, it could happen to other departments as well.

“It's a fearful time and I think faculty in all the departments and programs have a certain amount of fear and trepidation with what's going to happen to our future as a university,” Victorin-Vangerud said.

Religion has been a central part of Hamline's identity, as a Methodist-affiliated university, since its founding. The department worked in conjunction with philosophy for the first one hundred years and has been independent ever since.

“I think it is in the university's interest in very, very important ways to think and rethink carefully what loss of the department would mean,” Schwartz said. “What it means academically, as a part of the university's mission; socially, as a place in the larger social environment of the campus community; and I think in the life of alumni, in relationship to the larger community.”