

FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT
Evaluation of Undergraduate and Graduate Programs
Faculty of Theology
Saint Paul University
Cycle: 2021-2022
SCEUP: November 10, 2022
GPEC: November 21, 2022

I. Programs

- Honours B.A. with Major in Faith, Ethics, and Justice
- Master in Theological Studies (MTS)
- Master of Divinity (MDiv)
- Graduate Diploma in Catholic Bioethics
- M.A. in Theology
- Ph.D. in Theology

II. Evaluation Process (Outline of the visit)

- The Final Assessment Report for the evaluation of the aforementioned programs was based on the following documents: (a) the self-study brief produced by the academic unit, (b) the report produced by the external evaluators following their site visit, and (c) the comments from the Karl Hefty, Director of Undergraduate Studies, Christian Dionne, Director of Graduate Studies, and Michel Andraos, Dean, on the aforementioned documents.
- The site visit, which took place on May 10 and 11, 2022, was conducted by Susan K. Wood, Regis College, Toronto School of Theology, and Cory Andrew Labrecque, Université Laval.
- The reviewers were provided a comprehensive self-study brief that had been previously presented and discussed at the Faculty Assembly prior to revision effective January 31, 2022. The visit was conducted virtually due to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.
- The following individuals and groups of people were met by the external evaluators: 1) senior management from the University of Ottawa: Vice-Provost of Academic Affairs and Associate Vice-Provost of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies; 2) senior management from Saint Paul University: Rector, Vice-Rector of Academic and Research, Dean, Director of Graduate Programs, and Director of Undergraduate Programs; 3) regular and part-time professors; 4) several support staff members; and 5) undergraduate and graduate students.

III. Summary of Reports on the Quality of Programs¹

This section aims to inform the unit on the strengths and weaknesses observed during the evaluation process in order to improve its programs.

1. EMPHASIZING THE STRENGTHS AND IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES

Strengths

- Teaching and research themes that attract students, including Theology and the Environment, as well as Christianity and Indigenous Peoples. In terms of undergraduate theological education in Canada, the Honours BA with Major in Faith, Ethics, and Justice is one-of-a-kind.
- Attractive research centers and infrastructures, such as the Centre on the Church, Truth, and Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, the Research Centre for Vatican II and 21st Century Catholicism, the Research centre in Catholic Bioethics (lead by a female research chair in Bioethics), the Jean-Léon Allie University Library and Archives (recognized as one of the best in North America in philosophy, medieval studies, and theology).
- Given the challenges facing theological education in Canada, the Faculty of Theology as shown its adaptability by reducing its program offerings from 20 to six (6) to maximize limited resources.
- Several collaborative agreements, including a student placement agreement with Hotel Dieu Grace Hospital in Windsor for the students in the G.D. in Catholic Bioethics, the *Synode incorporé du diocèse d'Ottawa*, the *Facultad de Teología San Pablo* in Cochabamba, Bolivia. The latter will allow exchanges with theologians specializing in the field of indigenous theology.
- Students hold their professors in high regard.
- The excellent research library for theology and writing centre.

Challenges

- All programs have been developed in both official languages. However, in recent years, the BA, MTS and MDiv have been offered only in English. Accordingly, there is a need to increase recruitment of Francophone students.
- “Some clarity is lacking in regard to the status/perception of certain programs within the larger Canadian academic system”. Namely, the status of the MDiv and the MTS isn’t clear for the students interviewed.
- Students, administrative personnel, and professors lament the inefficiency of administrative processes that are frequently more complex and demanding than necessary.
- Challenges of assisting in meeting the various needs of local (church) communities, which occasionally seek out specific or personalized programming that cannot be developed/offered by a Faculty that is already overburdened.
- Part-time students, who make up a sizable proportion of the student population at the Faculty of Theology, have unique requirements that must be addressed, particularly in terms of course sequencing and financial aid. The need to increase funding of PhD students was also noted by the external evaluation.

2. PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- The Faculty of Theology is committed to the University of Ottawa's strategic plan, particularly in its goals of creating a more agile, connected, impactful and sustainable university community. In fact, the program requirements and program learning outcomes are clearly stated and are achievable. They are also aligned with degree level expectations.
- Overall, despite the challenges related to theological education in Canada, the external reviewers recognize that the Faculty of Theology has taken major actions by making indigenous

¹ Based on excerpt, often verbatim, from the self-study, the external evaluation report, and the program and decanal responses.

relations a priority, offering programming that links theological resources to contemporary bioethical issues, a commitment to inter/multidisciplinarity in hiring and teaching, and by striving to create synergy/collaboration with other faculties at Saint Paul University and the University of Ottawa.

3. CURRICULUM AND STRUCTURE

- The Faculty of Theology has successfully adapted to declining enrollment challenges. To meet demand and maximize limited resources, it has reduced program offerings from 20 to six (6). The external evaluation recommends grouping courses into microprograms and hiring doctoral students to teach some courses as additional actions.
- The current structure makes it easy for full-time students to complete their education within the prescribed time frame, which is not the case for part-time students. Indeed, many students are enrolled part-time, including many graduate students, and they complain that the course offerings are limited and not made available early enough.

4. TEACHING, LEARNING AND EVALUATION METHODS

- According to the external evaluation, “teaching and evaluation methods allow students to attain the program’s defined learning outcomes and Degree Level Expectations”.
- For undergraduate courses, the Faculty ensures that class sizes do not fall below 10. However, if the class size exceeds 25 students, the Faculty will provide a teaching assistant.

5. STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND GOVERNANCE

- “[Students] repeatedly underlined the stellar quality, reputation, and expertise of their professors, the benefits of small class sizes (which is the case in the Faculty of Theology), and an overall feeling of belonging to the USP community”.
- For the graduate programs, the students are more satisfied than the national average on all questions and steadily improving since 2016. The external evaluators observe that faculty research production varies significantly.
- Students from various programs expressed their concerns about the lack of appropriate advice, mentoring and guidance from the beginning and throughout their studies to better guide them in their program and their path. A new administrative academic advisor was recently hired to address the situation.

6. PHYSICAL SPACES AND RESOURCES

- With fewer and fewer students enrolled, there are fewer and fewer pedagogical resources: the Faculty of Theology currently has 12 regular professors (including the dean who is released from teaching, and two part-time professors).
- The ratio of teaching faculty to students seems adequate. However, the downsizing of the number of faculty members has increased the administrative load.
- Both the library and writing centre are extraordinarily valuable resources, which are well integrated into the programs’ curriculum. It was suggested that the rare book section of the library may be utilized more effectively.
- Finally, the external evaluation points at the need of updating the Faculty’s Web site, which may have a positive impact on recruitment.

IV. Program Improvement²

The programs under evaluation are in conformity with the standards of the discipline. The following recommendations aim at maintaining or increasing the level of quality already achieved by the programs.

The numbering of the recommendations follows that of the external reviewers' report.

Recommendation #1: Improve academic advising.

Recommendation #2: Heighten efforts to recruit Francophone (local and international) students.

Recommendation #3: Increase funding of PhD and international students; partial funding of part-time students.

Recommendation #4: "Bureaucracy audit".

Recommendation #5: Increase collaborative teaching and course-sharing with other divisions and institutions.

Recommendation #6: Community outreach.

Recommendation #7: Communications: targeted marking and website updating.

V. Action Plan

An action plan was developed jointly by the leadership of the program and the Dean. Several actions have already been undertaken to address the recommendations. Namely, two academic advisors have assigned to replace the existing structure to address the first recommendation.

Recommendations #2, #3, and #7 require the approval and funding from the Office of Research, the Office of the Vice-Rector of Academic and Research, as well the Recruitment and Communications Services.

VI. Conclusion

The external evaluation found "The objectives, degree-level expectations, and learning outcomes for each of the theological programs at USP evaluated here are clearly stated and professors are committed to offering courses that properly respond to these." Overall, despite the challenges related to theological education in Canada, the external reviewers recognize that the Faculty of Theology has taken major actions by making indigenous relations a priority and offering programming that links theological resources to contemporary bioethical issues. Suggestions for improvement are largely constructive in nature that is the comments focused on improving an already successful program, rather than indicating that fundamental changes are required.

In light of this positive assessment, the committee members would like to thank all participants for the evaluation of the programs. They congratulate the unit on the rigour of the work accomplished and on the quality of the self-study report, as well as that of the report produced by the external reviewers, for both the undergraduate as well as graduate programs.

Schedule and Timelines

A progress report that outlines the completed actions and subsequent results will be submitted to the evaluation committee by December 15, 2024.

The next cyclical review will take place in no more than eight years, in 2028-2029. The self-study brief must be submitted no later than June 15, 2028.

² Based on the External Evaluators Report.

Unit Response to the External Review Report and Action Plan

Faculty:

Faculty of Theology

Programs evaluated:

- Honours B.A. with Major in Faith, Ethics, and Justice
- Master in Theological Studies (MTS)
- Master of Divinity (MDiv)
- Graduate Diploma in Catholic Bioethics
- M.A. in Theology
- Ph.D. in Theology

Cyclical review period:

2021-2022

Date:

June 29, 2022; Modified, February 6, 2023.

- **General comments:**

On May 24, 2022, the Faculty of Theology received the External Reviewers' Report based on their analysis of the IQAP self-study and their interviews. The Faculty was very pleased with the positive evaluation of our programs. We were happy to know that the reviewers affirm the direction and reforms our Faculty has been engaged in over the past few years. We were gratified to hear that the external reviewers affirm that our "undergraduate and graduate programs were of excellent quality," that "student satisfaction was high," and that "no major issues with the programs, the learning objectives, courses or management of the programs were discovered." The report makes 7 recommendations, 4 of which are considered high priority. We agree with the recommendations, which affirm the conclusions of our self-study, and feel confident that by addressing them our Faculty will become even stronger. Please find in the following pages our response to the recommendations and plan of action.

Recommendation 1: Improve academic advising

Unit response: We agree with this recommendation. Several actions in this regard have already been taken over the past few months and more actions, as indicated below, will be taken in the fall of 2022 and will be ongoing.

Since the beginning of May 2022, two Academic Advisors from the Faculty of Human Sciences, who know well our Faculty and its programs because of their previous work, have been assigned to replace the structure that, for a variety of reasons identified in the IQAP report, was not working well. Students in all programs have been contacted, their files reviewed and updated, and they have been made aware of the new arrangement and given clear information about how to communicate with their new Academic Advisor. In collaboration with the registrar's office, the Program Coordinator of the Faculty of Theology has been facilitating a regular bi-weekly meeting since the beginning of June 2022 between the Academic Advisors and Program Directors. These regular meetings are intended to become permanent to follow up on any shortcomings of the plan and continue to improve the functioning of the new process. In addition, the actions listed below are planned for implementation as of the fall of 2022.

Priority Level*	Actions to be undertaken	Assigned to	Timeline	Curriculum change?
1	Assure that the current structure becomes permanent and that the Faculty of Theology will continue to have the right staff serving in this position.	Dean.	Fall 2022.	
1	Establish a clear process with the Academic Advisors to ensure that each newly admitted student can meet with their Program Director shortly after admission and receive clear academic orientation to their program.	Program Coordinator.	Starting in the fall of 2022 and ongoing.	
1	Organize a new student orientation at the beginning of each academic year to welcome new students and make sure they get a good introduction to their respective programs and the available services, including academic advisement.	Dean's office, Program Directors, organized by the Program Coordinator.	Starting in the fall of 2022 and ongoing.	

* PRIORITY LEVEL: 1. URGENT-IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUIRED 2. IMPORTANT-ACTION REQUIRED WITHIN 18 MONTHS (MAXIMUM) 3. ADVISED: DEVELOPMENT AND STRATEGY-ACTION TO BE DISCUSSED AND MUST BE IN PLACE BY MID-CYCLE (WITHIN 4 YEARS)

Recommendation 2: Heighten efforts to recruit Francophone (local and international) students

Unit response: We agree with this recommendation.

The Faculty is well aware that its French undergraduate programs have suffered as a result of several structural changes at the University. The faculties at Saint Paul University do not do their own recruitment. There is a specialized office and recruiting team doing this work. The Dean and members of the Faculty of Theology, especially the Program Coordinator, have been closely collaborating with the recruitment, marketing, and communications services and will continue to do so, focusing more intentionally on the recruitment of Francophone students.

Priority Level*	Actions to be undertaken	Assigned to	Timeline	Curriculum change?
2	The Faculty will meet once per term with the communications and recruitment staff to discuss their actions, give them current information, and follow-up.	Program Coordinator, Program Directors, and the Dean.	Regular meetings every term starting in the fall of 2022.	
2	In coordination with Recruitment and Communication Services, the Faculty will explore new ways to contribute to the recruitment efforts, such as faculty outreach, hiring skilled and passionate student helpers, community engagement, etc.	Dean's office.	Starting in the fall of 2022 and ongoing.	
2	Work with all departments of SPU to increase scholarships to Francophone students.	Dean's office.	Starting in the fall of 2022 and ongoing.	
2	Explore new possibilities for increasing attractive programming in the French language in all our degree programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels.	Program Coordinator, Program Directors, and the Dean.	Starting in the fall of 2022 and ongoing.	

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Recommendation 3: Increase funding of PhD and international students; partial funding of part-time students**Unit response:** We agree with this recommendation.

The Faculty is aware of the need to increase funding for its PhD students and international students. We are also aware that many of our students are working adults who are enrolled on a part-time basis and make significant personal and family sacrifices to pursue their theological education and vocation. It should be noted, however, that overseeing funding is the primary responsibility of the Office of Research and the Office of the Vice Rector of Academic and Research. Individual faculties do not manage student funding. The Faculty will strongly collaborate with all concerned departments of the University to increase funding to all students in need, especially PhD international students, and part-time students at the undergraduate level or at the master level.

Priority Level*	Actions to be undertaken	Assigned to	Timeline	Curriculum change?
1	Collaborate more closely with all concerned departments of the University to increase funding to theology students in need, especially PhD international students, and part-time students.	Dean's office.	Starting in the fall of 2022 and ongoing.	
1	Work with the Office of the Vice Rector of Academic and Research to restructure the internal University grants process in order to give priority to PhD international students and part-time students by sharing clear information with the students about the available grants and application process in a timely manner.	Dean's office.	Summer 2022. Action to be repeated each summer.	

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Recommendation 4: “Bureaucracy audit”

Unit response: This “audit” has already begun at the Faculty of Theology.

In October 2021, then new Dean requested that the Executive Committee of the University would hire an experienced person in administration to help do a review of all the administrative processes of the Faculty in view of reducing “bureaucracy” and increasing efficiency. Significant improvement has been achieved since. Faculty committees were restructured from that perspective. In addition, the IQAP process helped the Faculty identify more areas that required improvement such as filing and retrieving information, clarifying the tasks and procedures of the assistant to the Dean’s office, etc.

The new full-time, permanent faculty assistant and Program Coordinator, working together with the Dean and Program Directors, regularly discuss the administrative process and how to simplify procedures to make them more efficient.

A university-wide survey is currently being conducted by the newly hired Associate Vice-Rector of Talent, Diversity, and Culture that is precisely intended to do the same, namely an institutional “bureaucracy audit.” The Faculty of Theology will continue its own process and will closely collaborate with other institutional initiatives in this regard.

The administrative workload of the Dean and Program Directors has significantly been reduced and organized as a result of the changes in the academic advisement services and the hiring of a competent assistant to the Dean’s office and Program Coordinator.

Priority Level*	Actions to be undertaken	Assigned to	Timeline	Curriculum change?
1	The Dean’s office will continue to monitor on a regular basis student and faculty experience in view of simplification and efficiency of all our procedures. We will do this by conducting a brief student survey once every term to get feedback and identify new areas that require attention.	Assistant to the Dean’s office.	October 2022 and February 2023. Will be repeated once per year.	

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Recommendation 5: Increase collaborative teaching and course-sharing with other divisions and institutions

Unit response: We agree and fully embrace this recommendation.

This is an area that is underexplored at our university. The newly hired Program Coordinator has this task as one of her key responsibilities. The Dean and the Program Coordinator are making a plan to explore and coordinate collaborations starting in the early fall of 2022.

Priority Level*	Actions to be undertaken	Assigned to	Timeline	Curriculum change?
2	Meet with other Program Coordinators of the Faculties of Canon Law and Human Sciences and Philosophy to discuss the possibilities of course sharing and collaboration.	Program Coordinator.	Early fall 2022.	
3	Explore the possibilities of collaborating with other universities that have similar programs of SPU. The universities that are being explored for such a collaboration are: Laval University (Quebec), Dominican College (Ottawa), St. Mikes (Toronto), and Regis College (Toronto). Closer collaboration with the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Ottawa is also being explored.	Dean.	Starting in the summer of 2022 and ongoing.	

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Recommendation 6: Community outreach**Unit response:** The Faculty fully agrees with this recommendation.

The past two years of pandemic significantly limited the Faculty’s community outreach. As we are emerging into a new phase of more open social relations, the Faculty of Theology will take full advantage of community outreach and engagement. Several projects are already being discussed in this regard.

Priority Level*	Actions to be undertaken	Assigned to	Timeline	Curriculum change?
2	Development of micro programs in relevant and needed areas such as the churches and reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples to respond to some real needs in the faith communities and draw in more students.	Program Coordinator, Dean, Program Directors.	Starting in the fall of 2022.	
2	Promote faculty courses and activities by maintaining a current mailing list from previous community events.	Assistant to the Dean’s office.	Summer 2022 and ongoing.	
2	Meeting with the bishops from different denominations in the Ottawa and Gatineau areas to discuss the needs of their dioceses and inform them about our programs.	Dean and MDiv Director.	Starting in the summer of 2022 and ongoing.	

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Recommendation 7: Communications: targeted marketing and website updating

Unit response: The Faculty plays a minor role in how programs are advertised and marketed.

This work is done by the offices of marketing and communications. We do, however, maintain regular contact with these offices and respond promptly to their requests. The information on the University's website is outdated and requires revision. The launch of a totally revamped university website has been delayed by one year, which explains the situation. The new date of the launching the website is September 2022. All information about our programs and activities is being revised and updated and will be online as soon as the new website is operational.

In addition, the Faculty will endeavour to produce compelling short videos to present our programs and testimonials by students.

Priority Level*	Actions to be undertaken	Assigned to	Timeline	Curriculum change?
1	Create a focused marketing strategy with Recruitment and Communication Services.	Dean's office.	Already started in the winter of 2022 and will be ongoing.	
2	Create testimonial videos to add to our web pages.	Dean's office and Recruitment and Communication Services.	Beginning of winter 2023.	
2	Hiring students to assist with community visits to speak about their positive learning experience and promote our programs.	Dean's office and program directors.	Starting in winter 2023 and ongoing.	

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