John C. Keller, Dean  
Graduate College  
Office of the Dean  
205 Gilmore Hall

Re: Department of Religious Studies’ response to the evaluation by the Task Force on Graduate Education

We appreciate the fact that the Task Force has recognized the department’s ongoing efforts to strengthen and improve the graduate program in Religious Studies. The recommendations contained in the assessment are well-taken and we will continue to act on them.

We have just a few further comments. First, we agree that any graduate program should “focus on admitting students whose research interests match those of the department faculty.” We have in the past been highly intentional in admitting only graduate students whose interests resonate with those of specific members of the faculty, and we will continue this policy in the future. Secondly, while we are working to reduce the department’s overall time-to-degree, it must be noted that there are some structural issues for many of our students. Graduate students in Islam and Asian religious traditions, as well as some in Western historical traditions, must acquire uncommon language skills in a time-consuming process that can significantly lengthen an individual’s TTD. In addition, many of our graduate students undertake field work in other countries such as India, China, Japan, the Arab world, Germany, or France as part of the research for their dissertation, which can also lengthen the time to degree. This commitment to intensive foreign-language and field studies has enabled many of our students to make important contributions to the international field of religious studies. Finally, we do not believe that the department’s main potential for further curricular and scholarly synergies lies with Classics and Philosophy. Although department faculty and students have in the past worked with members of these departments, we have had far more frequent scholarly and curricular interactions with faculty in departments such as Anthropology, English, History, and Asian and Slavic Languages and Literatures.

Sincerely,

Morten Schlütter  
Acting Chair of Religious Studies