



## Toronto School of Theology

*affiliated with the University of Toronto*

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### CYCLICAL REVIEW IN THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESS ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSE TO THE EXTERNAL REVIEW

(Site visit: January 10–11, 2012; review report: April 26, 2012)

The Toronto School of Theology is grateful for the report of the external reviewers as part of our University of Toronto Quality Assurance Process (UTQAP) cyclical review. The primary and most important feature of the report is the reviewers' vision for a new relationship between U of T and TST, where theological studies would continue to have a distinct disciplinary identity but where TST would work much more closely with U of T. Most importantly, in their vision this new relationship would include interdisciplinary mentoring and research at the graduate level, as well as shared service to external publics. The Heads of our seven member colleges, the TST academic directors, and I have given this report careful attention, and we have had several fruitful conversations with officials in the School of Graduate Studies, the Faculty of Arts and Science, and the office of the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs. With a view to addressing the recommendations of the external review, we have already made several changes in programs, policies and procedures, established new review processes, launched a "Towards 2030" planning project, and embarked with the U of T on some collaborative processes which we expect will take the relationship in the direction which the reviewers have recommended.

**Background and significance.** For U of T departments, cyclical reviews under UTQAP are an important but generally routine way of assuring and strengthening educational quality. For TST, this first UTQAP review is much more than that. It recommends re-situating our institutional relationship with U of T. TST welcomes the prospect of a renewed relationship with U of T along the lines envisioned by the UTQAP reviewers.

This UTQAP review is the first full University-commissioned external review of TST's programs since 1977, when a distinguished team (R.B.Y. Scott, Claude Welch, and Wilfred Cantwell Smith) recommended TST programs for inclusion in the first Memorandum of Agreement between U of T and TST. The University was also administratively involved in reviews of our Th.M. and Th.D. programs conducted in 2001 and 2003 by the Ontario Council of Graduate Studies (OCGS). Both reviews evaluated these programs as of "good quality." (The 2003 review took an abbreviated form and was designed simply to bring TST and the Department of the Study of Religion into the same review cycle.) The University has also relied for its quality assurance of our programs on the accreditation processes of the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, a highly respected member of the Council of Higher Education Accreditation, that is also recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

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Emmanuel College – *United* • Knox College – *Presbyterian* • Regis College – *Roman Catholic, Jesuit* • St. Augustine's Seminary – *Roman Catholic, Diocesan*  
University of St. Michael's College – *Roman Catholic, Basilian* • University of Trinity College – *Anglican* • Wycliffe College – *Anglican, Evangelical*

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Conrad Grebel University College – *Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre – Mennonite* • Huron University College – *Anglican*  
Institute for Christian Studies – *Reformed* • Waterloo Lutheran Seminary – *Evangelical Lutheran*

When Ontario's new Quality Assurance Framework was approved in 2010, it gave universities the responsibility to conduct cyclical reviews of conjoint degree programs. The current (2004) Memorandum of Agreement between TST and U of T had provided for such reviews, but did not require them or define them. The Quality Assurance Framework, by making TST more regularly accountable to U of T in regard to quality standards, had the effect of creating a new relationship between TST and U of T, one which offered unforeseen strategic opportunities. For instance, it has laid the ground for closer partnerships in teaching and research between theological studies and a variety of cognate University-based disciplines (such as Study of Religion, Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, History, Classics, Medieval Studies, Philosophy, Education, and Music). In addition, it has encouraged both parties to consider the instrumental value of TST's programs for the University's mission, and to recognize ways in which theological studies relates to the wider work of the University.

While we welcome this closer relationship with the University, it presents challenges. As an affiliated school, we and our member colleges have missional identities distinct from the University, and, indeed, this distinctiveness is an important part of our value as the University's partners. These missional identities provide authority for each TST member institution's academic programs and faculty appointments; they also link us to the wider world of theological education in North America. The University's claim to a broader authority over our programs raises questions relating to the integrity of the independent institutional identities and missions of our member colleges. In our academic planning, in developing a TST "Towards 2030" plan, through our systems of governance, and in the pending negotiation of a renewed Memorandum of Agreement with the U of T, both the beneficial and problematic implications of our developing relationship will need to be sorted out.

*Character of the report of the review team.* In bold language, the team's report proposes that "now is an opportune time further to develop the relationship between TST and U of T" (p. 1). They offer the observation that U of T has been increasing its academic engagement with religions, and is now poised "to take its place with McGill, Cambridge, Chicago, Yale, Harvard, Oxford, Duke, Durham, Edinburgh, and many more." It could "become one of the leading centres of theological and religious studies in the world."

TST is grateful for the encouragement and support we have experienced from key University leaders as together we begin to move collaboratively towards the fulfillment of this vision. The reviewers provide insight for this process, with some helpful recommendations for changes in TST structures, as well as changes in the organizational and financial relationships between TST and U of T. At least as important as its recommendations is the function which the UTQAP report has served in framing and organizing the conversations with University leaders to which we referred earlier. These have helped us considerably as we begin to map out a path forward which is both exciting and realistic.

Because of the review team's focus on future possibilities, its report said strikingly little about matters which are usually expected in a UTQAP review, such as the suitability of program objectives, quality of curriculum, admissions standards, assessment of learning, and resources (except that they agree that the library system is excellent). Nor did the report offer analysis or evaluation of the quality indicators assembled in our self-study report. It is possible that the UTQAP reviewers omitted this work because they had copies of our recent accreditation reports from ATS. Our academic programs had just been scrutinized in considerable detail in late 2011 by seven accrediting teams from ATS — one team for the TST consortium and one team for each of six of our member schools. Each of these seven teams comprised three faculty members from university-related or free-

standing accredited theological schools, plus staff members with an intimate knowledge of North American theological education and the professional requirements of accreditation. All teams strongly affirmed the educational quality of TST's programs, and made recommendations (which have since been approved by the Commission on Accrediting) for long-term renewals of our accreditation. At the same time, our ATS reviewers gave us a very strong and clear recommendation that we needed to review our relationships with U of T and among our member colleges, not because they were defective but because they could be enriched.

Although the UTQAP reviewers did not assess our programs, they did supply a ranking of them as being above, at, or below standard. (They did not say what they chose as their standard.) In most cases these rankings seem consistent with the conclusions of the ATS reports (which, however, do not include rankings). By exception, they ranked three of our degree programs (including two conjoint degree programs) as being "below standard." These three rankings appear to be at variance with the conclusions of the peer review teams from ATS. We do agree that these programs can be significantly improved: whether they were "below standard" at the time of the site visit as the UTQAP reviewers thought, or at least "at standard" as the ATS reviewers thought, we can all agree that our goal is to make them very much "above standard". Since receiving the report of the UTQAP reviewers, we have received clear verbal indications from University administrators as to the substantive issues that probably underlay the UTQAP report. We recognize that the way forward is not to try to discern or challenge the thinking of the external reviewers, but to use U of T's academic standards as a measure and to ensure that our programs meet or exceed those standards.

#### *Curriculum and program development.*

Number of programs. The reviewers suggest that our program offerings require better "coordinating and streamlining". We understand this observation to mean primarily that we have too many degree programs. We recognize our need to reduce the number of programs and to introduce clear streams within the remaining ones in order to allow us to make better use of resources, to present our programs more clearly to prospective students, and to improve administrative efficiencies.

At the basic degree level (this is our nomenclature for second-entry undergraduate programs), at the time of the review we had seven conjoint programs and one non-conjoint program. Since then, we have closed one. As part of our current process of academic planning, we are reviewing others. The regulations of our ATS accrediting body impose constraints on how we construct and name our degree programs. Benefiting from conversations with the School of Graduate Studies, we are exploring the possibility of re-organizing some basic degree streams as graduate streams. This appears to us to be a realistic objective since by U.S. Department of Education standards they are already accredited at a graduate level.

Duplication of courses. TST has begun to analyze its course offerings in light of concerns related to unnecessary duplication of courses. Our analysis is somewhat complicated, given the fact that course codes that can appear to represent course duplications sometimes do not indicate courses at all; they can be used for research projects, off-site field placements and internships, supervisions, and placeholders. Duplications can also be difficult to identify when two courses have very different interests but similar titles, suggesting that in many instances we need to be clearer about naming and describing our courses. In still other cases, what appear to be different courses really function as different sections of the same course. Whatever duplication exists appears almost exclusively within the basic degree level. In some cases, individual colleges may sponsor courses because of a missional interest with little conversation outside their particular program needs. In part this suggests a need

for better communication between our member colleges. For both economic and educational reasons, we have begun this discussion and intend to address the matter.

Duplication of faculty. We address this matter below under the heading "Faculty."

Differentiating between and articulating common educational standards and purposes for basic and advanced degrees. This recommendation from the UTQAP report is unclear to us. TST already complies fully with accrediting standards requiring a differentiation between basic and advanced degree programs in respect to admission standards, resources, learning outcomes, academic standards, and curriculum. There should be no room for confusion in this respect. We believe that the recommendation by the UTQAP external reviewers on this point may be related to the question of faculty renewal since the reviewers did indicate that they would like us to make clear distinctions between teaching-stream faculty members serving exclusively at the basic degree level and research faculty members who will work within a conjoint Ph.D. program. This point is addressed below under the heading "Faculty."

Creation of a conjoint Ph.D. program; closing the conjoint Th.D. program. Since April we have made considerable progress towards a proposal for a conjoint Ph.D. program, working with a task force that includes senior faculty members from cognate disciplines in the Faculty of Arts and Science, and strongly supported by the Provost's Office and the School of Graduate Studies. We have seconded a senior TST faculty member at 20% FTE to lead our work. The process of designing the conjoint Ph.D. program includes, among other things, (a) a review of the research and publication output of faculty members who will prospectively serve as supervisors; (b) a redefinition of program fields; (c) a review of our admissions process; (d) improvements in curriculum; (e) improved arrangements for mentoring; (f) more intentional and effective cohort formation; (g) an efficient deployment of faculty resources through increased attention to TST-wide academic planning; and (h) full conformity with current SGS policies.

We intend to have many of these improvements in place (assuming approvals by governance, where required) for the Th.D. cohort of September 2013.

Our goal — dependent, of course, on necessary approvals — is to be able to admit the first students to the conjoint Ph.D. program in September 2014. If we can achieve this goal, then the last cohort admitted to the conjoint Th.D. program will be the one in September 2013. These two outcomes will satisfy the recommendations in this regard of the external review team.

Assessment of Doctor of Ministry program as "below standard." The TST UTQAP self-study candidly identified several problems with our D.Min. program, including insufficiently developed statements of learning outcomes, ambiguities in the level of instruction, insufficient and ineffectively deployed faculty resourcing, inefficient academic administration, and a complex curriculum poorly suited to program goals. The UTQAP review report did not provide either its own assessments or suggestions for improvement.

As of January 1, 2012, we appointed a new Interim Director of the program (Professor Joseph Schnier) with a mandate to reform and reorganize this program. Professor Schnier has a Ph.D. in psychology from U of T in addition to his theological training as well as considerable experience as a senior academic administrator, and he is ideally suited to bringing this program to standard. He has made personnel changes, reorganized the academic office, and cleared a large backlog of delays in student supervision and assessment. Through TST's academic governance, culminating in our

Advanced Degree Council (which has two University representatives), he has significantly revised, focused, and simplified the curriculum to connect it tightly to program goals. Courses have been reorganized and revised to clarify graduate degree-level expectations. Faculty resourcing has been rationalized and strengthened, although this remains a work in progress. Highly qualified faculty members have been identified as a core faculty. Program supervisions are being more actively and creatively managed. Program deadlines and grading practices policy are being carefully enforced. The teaching of research methods has been considerably improved. We believe that with the newly admitted cohort the program is now operating "at standard."

With the encouragement of the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs, and the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, we intend to submit a proposal to have the conjoint D.Min. program recognized at a graduate level.

Assessment of Doctor of Theology program as "below standard." Because we intend to close the conjoint Th.D. program, as indicated above, it is not necessary to respond to this evaluation at great length. We would only register our belief, confirmed by the ATS accreditation reviews, that our conjoint Th.D. program has indeed been operating at the standard of accredited North American doctoral programs in theological studies. The faculty who teach in this program have all been approved by status committees with University representation; all students have entered the program with at least two degrees, with no less than a 3.70 CGPA in their last degree; and every doctoral thesis examination committee since 1978 has had a University representative, as well as an external examiner, who have confirmed the quality of the thesis. Five years after graduation, 88% of graduates have post-secondary teaching appointments or church appointments. Nevertheless, to repeat an earlier point, our clear goal remains a doctoral program that will be "above standard".

The UTQAP external reviewers also reported on TST's current non-conjoint Ph.D. program in theology offered by the University of St. Michael's College. This program exactly mimics TST's conjoint Th.D. program. While U of T has no formal interest in the non-conjoint Ph.D. program, it may be useful for us to say that TST will be closing this program permanently, without prejudice to our current students.

Student transfers from the conjoint Th.D. program to the non-conjoint Ph.D. program at St. Michael's. The arrangement identified by the reviewers has been a problem for TST for many years. This matter is addressed at some length in our UTQAP self-study, but our response here requires a short summary with attention to necessary nuances. When TST was formed in 1969, the non-Roman Catholic member colleges were collaborating on a Th.D. program, and St. Michael's was offering a Ph.D. program. After 1969 TST assumed authority for the Th.D. program, but St. Michael's continued to administer its own Ph.D. program until 1979, when it transferred authority over its academic administration to TST. When conjoint degrees in theology were proposed during the negotiations for the first Memorandum of Agreement in 1975, the Ph.D. in theology was excluded as a conjoint degree, but the Memorandum of Agreement affirmed that the status of the Ph.D. would be a continuing topic of conversation. However, it is only in the last year that serious conversations along these lines between TST and U of T have emerged. In the meantime, TST's dilemma has been that it needed the Ph.D. program because its nomenclature was the recognized international standard, but it also needed the Th.D. program, which represented a high level of academic partnership with U of T. The programs themselves have been identical. The result was that some students who entered a Th.D. program came to prefer a degree with Ph.D. nomenclature, and therefore applied to transfer. (Occasionally, the transfer happened in the other direction.) No formal provision has ever been made for this practice by any unit of TST governance, other than the general provision that any institution

makes to permit the possibility of student transfers. Over the years, through the weight of accumulated precedent, students have come to expect a right of transfer from one program to the other, subject to a process for approval. The statistics are as follows: from 2001 to 2011, St. Michael's graduated 117 Ph.D. students in theology, of whom 84 were transfer students from the Th.D. Of these 84 transfer students, 66 were domestic students. In the same period, the six member colleges that participate in the Th.D. program graduated 59 students. Thus slightly more students transferred from the Th.D. to the Ph.D. programs than remained in the Th.D. program.

During this period, our member schools have realized very little government funding for the Th.D. From 2001 to 2006, most Th.D. BIU's were unfunded. Under the graduate expansion program since 2006, TST has experienced funding clawbacks from negative expansion, based on a serious statistical anomaly in its base enrolment figures.

Students admitted since May 1, 2012, have been advised that transfers from the Th.D. program to the Ph.D. program will not be available. According to legal advice we have received, Th.D. students already in the program should be allowed the transfer because of the prevailing practice and understanding at the time of their admission.

#### *Faculty.*

Faculty standards. The UTQAP review team "recommended a process for ensuring that faculty involved in the offering of conjoint degrees meet U of T standards for research, teaching and other qualifications." In fact, such processes already exist under the Memorandum of Agreement. All faculty members teaching in conjoint programs must be approved by a Faculty Appointments Committee which has two University representatives. In practice the other members of this Committee defer to the judgment of the University representatives in all questions of the University's academic standards in teaching and research. Similarly, all faculty members who will be functioning regularly in advanced degree teaching must be approved by a Status Committee which also has two University representatives. *Ad hoc* appointments for specific tasks of advanced degree teaching and supervision, which were formerly allowed, have been discontinued. Since the decentralization of appointments to SGS membership at U of T, SGS actually has stronger input into graduate faculty appointments at TST than within the U of T.

The UTQAP external review recommended that University representatives might sit on TST faculty search committees. This practice is already in place in some TST member colleges, and we believe that a similar practice could be developed acceptably within other colleges.

Some faculty members who met University standards at the time of their appointment have under-performed since then. Processes for consistent review in this area will be developed by each college for its basic degree faculty, and by TST for advanced degree faculty.

For the proposed conjoint Ph.D. program in theological studies, a core faculty will be appointed based on a fresh review of CV's. An important step towards this objective was taken on September 6, when three senior academics (one from TST, one from U of T, and one from a top-tier U.S. university-related theological school) scrutinized the CV's of TST faculty members and recommended twenty-four to accompany our degree program application.

Faculty renewal plan; long-range plan. These two items in the UTQAP report, one in the category "Faculty" and one in the category "Relationships," are related. The review team says, "We recommend that the 'Towards 2030' planning document of TST include a road map for faculty

renewal that is coordinated across the TST Colleges.” The Heads of the TST member colleges, with the TST Directors, have established themselves as a “Towards 2030” planning committee with the goal of completing a long-range plan, including a faculty renewal plan, by the end of the 2012-13 academic year.

We are currently working to distinguish a teaching stream within our TST faculty which would function at the basic degree level, particularly in the professional stream. Informally we have already adopted this distinction in our Faculty Appointments Committee, and a new draft policy is currently under review.

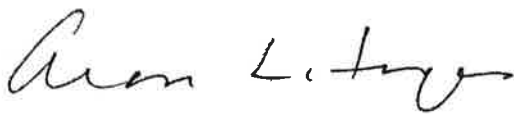
**Research.** The reviewers suggest several ways of improving the research profile of the TST faculty. This area will be incorporated into our TST-wide “Towards 2030” planning, since it will require a review of institutional missions and priorities, definitions of research areas, recognition of University complementarities, closer connections of curriculum to research mandates, reviews of faculty workload, and more effective systems of faculty deployment.

In particular, the reviewers recommend that the U of T allow TST faculty members access to the services of its research office. We would welcome this opportunity. We would hope to include this matter in our discussions towards a renewed Memorandum of Agreement.

**Relationships.** TST and U of T have already embarked on discussions that include a revised financial arrangement, alignments in planning, closer academic collaboration, and cooperation in serving external communities.

**Multi-faith considerations.** The UTQAP review notes the significance of recent multi-faith initiatives in which TST is involved, particularly its close association with the new Canadian Yeshiva and Rabbinical School, and certificate and degree programs at Emmanuel College in Muslim Studies intended partly to provide culturally contextualized education for Muslims seeking to serve as chaplains in public contexts. We anticipate that if and when the CY&RS becomes provincially chartered, we would support its full membership in TST and assist it in applying to open conjoint degree programs under UTQAP.

**Conclusion.** This UTQAP review takes its place with the Federation Act of 1887 and the Memorandum of Agreement of 1978 as landmarks in the evolution of the relation of the theological schools to the University of Toronto. In areas where the missions of U of T and the TST member colleges overlap, including excellence in graduate teaching and in research, and service to external publics, we see important opportunities in a closer relationship. We expect that this mutually beneficial re-setting of TST’s relationship with U of T, which has already begun, will be a major piece of our pending discussions concerning a revised Memorandum of Agreement.



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