

Given the program's name, are Religion and Psychology your main cognate units?

The program's name was assigned 17 years ago. Because we've been caught in the UTQAP process now for 4 years, we haven't been allowed to update the name to clarify our disciplinary context. The program investigates *interdisciplinary interactions between* Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health. These are not three nouns in a list, but three nouns that together indicate an interdisciplinary research field called Contemplative Science.

What is Contemplative Science?

Contemplative Science is a discipline that emerges out of 20 years of interdisciplinary research interactions between Buddhist and scientific traditions. Given limited resources, we maintain a coherent focus on Buddhist-derived practices; given additional resources, we welcome expanding into emerging research areas.

We like rigor. Contemplative Science doesn't sound rigorous.

The Journal of Contemplative Studies, *The Journal of Contemplative Inquiry*, or *CONTEMPLATIVA: Journal of Contemplative Studies* are good places to start learning about the field; also see [The International Society for Contemplative Research](#). We encourage all to read our syllabi and CVs, do research, learn, and ask questions.

What is "first person" research?

Student-centered pedagogical methods using "first person" research may involve contemplative, action inquiry, micro-phenomenological, or reflective learning. Along with training students in ("third person") qualitative and quantitative research, scientific literacy, and writing skills, BPMH courses focus on developing students' capacities for self-awareness using healing-centered pedagogies that emphasize meta-cognitive learning. These evidence-based methods are used in many disciplines at the University. Citations available upon request.

If your program teaches about Buddhism, does it belong in the Religion department?

No. Contemplative Science is not a sub-discipline of Religious Studies. Religious traditions are taught about from a variety of perspectives in many departments, including Anthropology, History, Philosophy, Political Science, East Asian Studies, Near and Middle Eastern Studies, and many more.

Are most of the students in your program Religion students?

No. OFR data tells us that only 4% of our enrolled minors are also Religion students. The units with whom we share the most students are Psychology, Philosophy, Environment, Human Biology, Cognitive Science, Equity & Solidarity, Sociology, and Mathematics (in order of number of students, from most to least). 56% of our students come from the Sciences & Social Sciences.

Isn't teaching mental health literacy the domain of the student health centre?

Not exclusively. BPMH student surveys and support letters show the value of our program's approach on their academic success and overall well-being. The BPMH Program Support Dossier describes a growing number of universities across N. America now encouraging classroom engagement with mental health literacy. At the very least, universities care about the economic case: research clearly shows the impact of teaching mental health literacy on student health and academic outcomes, which increases student retention and thus also tuition revenue. Citations available on request.

Should all programs be in Departments not Colleges?

There are 24 academic programs across the 7 colleges; colleges are the traditional homes for interdisciplinary programs. 71% of college programs have fewer than 200 students, 41% have fewer than 100. With over 300 students, BPMH is one of the largest, most in-demand College programs.

Is the November 2023 program closure recommendation the result of a poor UTQAP external review?

We don't see how. Reviewers wrote that the program "fills an important niche in the educational mission of the University, and its objectives are consistent with the Faculty of Arts & Science's academic plan... The impressive growth of the BPMH program is a testament to not only its success, but also to the demand for such a program at the U of T." Concerns about the review process are summarized [here](#).

Was the consultation that took place during the UTQAP external review adequate for the program closure process now?

During their 4-hour virtual review visit in June 2021, reviewers spoke to 3 undergraduates (less than 1% of program students), 2 TAs (20%), 4 faculty (50%) and administrative staff. Inadequate consultation due to pandemic complications is one of several concerns about the review process summarized [here](#).

Has the program changed since its Jan 2020 Self-Study?

Between 2019 and 2024, substantial changes were undertaken in consultation with program faculty, cognate units, and faculty governance. The program: hired new instructors, selected with new criteria; discontinued some courses and introduced new courses; revised every course description to reflect changes in course content and program orientation; revised the calendar's description and program website; revised the list of courses in cognate units that count for the program. The program also:

- expanded collaborative research opportunities with cognate units, including Religion, Public Health, HCBS, Environment, OISE, Law, Temerty Faculty of Medicine, and Emmanuel College;
- worked with Advancement, resulting in a successful grant from a major donor and other opportunities pending;
- grew its community mailing list to over 1000 members and its YouTube Channel to over 16,000 views;
- created a new and very engaged peer-mentoring program;

- had conversations with Principal MacElhinney and did surveys and focus groups with students, aiming to connect with cognate units to secure teaching faculty commitments; expand online offerings; consider a revenue-generating professional degree stream; expand to an undergraduate major.

Have the Program Directors secured continuing faculty resources from cognate units?

We were only told of this requirement in November 2023, and as recently as last week, were told that this is the responsibility of Chairs/Principals, not Program Directors. In March 2023 the PD was explicitly told not work on strengthening connections with cognate units because the Dean would be making these connections for us. The Program received no further updates until the Nov 2023 closure recommendation. In the past and recently we have had encouraging conversations with cognate units, and we look forward to solidifying these connections now. See the Program Support Dossier for more.

Is there any fundraising potential with this kind of program?

The Program Support Dossier reveals immense fundraising potential. U of Wisconsin, U of Virginia, Penn State, Monash U, and Texas Christian U, to name a few, have raised hundreds of millions of dollars because philanthropists see the importance of evidence-based work with significant benefits to struggling students. Dr Germano, who has raised \$200 million at UVA's Center for Contemplative Science, writes in his support letter, "I have never seen such openness and passion on the part of the donors as I have seen over the past decade for contemplation and student flourishing." Citations available on request.