

Department: Philosophy and Religious Studies

Course Number: RSTD 236

Course Name: Sacred Communication

Check box for Honors course consideration ☐

Submission Checklist

Proposal   X  

Syllabus   X  

UCC Proposal for new course       

**AREA OF INQUIRY**

**IDENTITY, INSTITUTIONS AND SOCIETIES**

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This form must be submitted to the Liberal Learning Council as part of the submission process.

Please attach a proposed syllabus for this course and the Undergraduate Curriculum Course Proposal Form, if new course.

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**DEADLINE FOR PROPOSALS: 1 October 2006**

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Please answer the following questions:

**Check Only One:**

X This course is an existing course (in the current curriculum) that we are now proposing for this Area of Inquiry.

◇ This is a new course that we are now proposing for this Area of Inquiry.

1. Name and contact information of the curriculum point person for the department administering this course.

George Teschner, [teschner@cnu.edu](mailto:teschner@cnu.edu), 594-7171

2. In any given semester, how many sections of this course is your department willing to offer? 2

3. Why is this course being offered/what is it designed to achieve (Course purpose/goal)?

This course is concerned with the way religious peoples communicate, both socially and transcendentally, their experience of the Holy. Technology has delivered us all into what Marshall McLuhan called a “global village.” In this village we will all come into contact with peoples from societies that are foreign to our own, and some of us will travel in countries that are far different from our own. In light of Emile Durkheim’s argument that religion plays a central role in society and in order to better understand and appreciate societies and social identities, we need to see the role religion plays in social construction. It may be argued that religious experience is integral with being human. Religion affects and reflects the way people experience the world both individually and socially. Some argue that religion is a filter through which we make sense of the world. Religion is expressed and experienced both individually and institutionally through various media and in the form of stories, poetry, songs, architecture, music, dance, print, script, and pictorial representation, which are all mediated forms of communication. In order to better understand the intersection of religious communication in the formation of individual and social identity, as well as the role institutions play in that intersection, we will examine mediated forms of communication that express sacred experience. The focus of this class will be upon the human

attempt to communicate the experience of the Holy in the context of individual, social, and institutional identity.

4. Check the learner objectives below that the course will address. The first objective is required and every proposal must include at least two more objectives from the list below.

X a.) Identify concepts, patterns, and issues that affect the organization of societies, shape individual thought, or shape social mores (**required**)

◇ b.) Compare and contrast the effects of these concepts, patterns and issues on individuals, cultural institutions, or societies

X c.) Identify an institutional or societal structure (or structures) and its (or their) influence on individuals

◇ d.) Explain the fluid role of the individual within society (reflecting the multiple and sometimes contradictory roles of individuals within society)

X e.) Recognize the influence of societal or cultural context on self and others as individuals

◇ f.) Objectively and critically evaluate concepts of self and individuality

5. Briefly explain how this class addresses each objective checked in #4. Be sure to indicate the objective by its letter. A course may cover more than three objectives.

Objective a: This course approaches religious identity, institutions and societies in light of the concept of social construction through mediated communication. The course examines the effect that media have on social construction as it relates to the organization of society, the shaping of individual thought, and the formation of social mores. The course follows the evolution of communication media from oral transmission, through the written word, and into the electronic age. The course will focus on religious communication and explore its effect in the above mentioned concepts, patterns and issues.

Objective c: This course will identify structures of sacred communication media that are used by various religious institutions and representing multiple religious perspectives. Individual identities will be examined in light of such structures as sacred story telling and song, religious architecture, sacred music, ritual dance, and orality versus print technologies.

Objective e: This course will recognize the influence of religious aspects of society on individuality through an examination of the interplay between institutional and individual communication practices. As individual selves are immersed in a world that is mediated by religious communication practices, they form their own identities and project identity on their peers through reflexive communication. This course will examine these influences.

6. Course Assessment: **Check below how this course will accomplish the objectives in #5 (choose at least one).**

X Participating in class discussion and debate

◇ Engaging in teamwork and other collaborative exercises

X Writing analytical or evaluative papers, perhaps incorporating original research

◇ Making oral presentations

◇ Creating an artistic product or a performance

X Participating in fieldwork

◇ Other means – please identify

7. Attach a proposed syllabus, which includes a statement of purpose, course objectives, and how these objectives will be accomplished.

8. Explain how this course connects to Vision 2010 – the CNU Strategic Plan (<http://www.cnu.edu/Vision2010>)  
The links are down the left side of the page.)

This course will be an important part of the CNU priority to establish a vital curriculum. Studying religious communication practices of the world is an integral aspect of the liberal arts. The materials examined in the context of this course will provide students with the kinds of challenging material that are consistent with liberal learning. This subject matter provides touch stones whereby students will be able to make connections with other disciplines within the liberal learning tradition at CNU. A study of sacred communication facilitates an understanding of the changing quality of knowledge. All human knowledge is mediated through communication practices and much of that knowledge reflects a religious consciousness. Knowledge and religious consciousness have evolved in conjunction with the advancement of communication technologies. A study of these religious communication practices will foster an appreciation for interrelations within and among divergent societies and communities.

**UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM COMMITTEE  
CHANGE TO AN EXISTING COURSE FORM**

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Check as appropriate:

- ☐ Changing Credit hours on a course
- ☐ Changing Triplets on a course
- ☐ Course Title change
- ☒ Course Number Change
- ☐ Changing pre- or co-requisites on a course
- ☐ Changing a Course Equivalent
- ☐ Deleting a course from the UG Catalog

**Note:** Minor Course Description changes (grammatical edits or minor rewording of the course description) are done as annual edits to the UG Catalog.

Reason for change:   Making the course accessible to first and second year students as an Area of Inquiry without prerequisites.  

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Existing Course listed as:

SUBJ: RSTD Course #: 336 Title: Sacred Communication

Credit(s): 3 Triplet (hours listed as credit-lecture-lab/practicum/studio) : 3 - 3 - 0

Prerequisite: Junior Standing

Corequisite: None

Course Equivalent (Course formerly taught as): \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Change as listed below:

SUBJ: RSTD Course #: 236 Title: Sacred Communication

Credit(s): 3 Triplet (hours listed as credit-lecture-lab/practicum/studio) : 3 - 3 - 0

Prerequisite: None

Corequisite: None

Course Equivalent (Course formerly taught as): RSTD 336

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

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APPROVALS:	Concur	Do Not Concur*
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Department Chair: _____	Date: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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College Curriculum Committee: _____	Date: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Dean: _____	Date: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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UCC Processed and Provost notified date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(no formal UCC approval needed)

*\*If “Do Not Concur” is checked, please attach a statement of explanation.*

**CHRISTOPHER NEWPORT UNIVERSITY**  
**Religion 236**  
**Sacred Communication**

**Instructor: Dr. Kip Redick**

**Office: BTC 211**

**Phone: 594-7801**

**Email: [kredick@cnu.edu](mailto:kredick@cnu.edu)**

**Fax: 594-7349**

**Office Hours: Open hours are 2-4 Monday and Wednesday, 8:30-9:30 Tuesday and Thursday. Regular appointments may be scheduled through the secretary between 1-2 Monday and Wednesday or between 3-4 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday. Appointments can be scheduled with me for other times as needs dictate.**

**Secretary: Princess Nilen**

**Phone: 594-8827**

**Syllabus**

***Introduction to the Course:***

This course is concerned with the way religious peoples communicate, both socially and transcendentally, their experience of the Holy. Technology has delivered us all into what Marshall McLuhan called a "global village." In this village we will all come into contact with peoples from societies that are foreign to our own, and some of us will travel in countries that are far different from our own. In light of Emile Durkheim's argument that religion plays a central role in society and in order to better understand and appreciate societies and social identities, we need to see the role religion plays in social construction. It may be argued that religious experience is integral with being human. Religion affects and reflects the way people experience the world both individually and socially. Some argue that religion is a filter through which we make sense of the world. Religion is expressed and experienced both individually and institutionally through various media and in the form of stories, poetry, songs, architecture, music, dance, print, script, and pictorial representation, which are all mediated forms of communication. In order to better understand the intersection of religious communication in the formation of individual and social identity, as well as the role institutions play in that intersection, we will examine mediated forms of communication that express sacred experience. The focus of this class will be upon the human attempt to communicate the experience of the Holy in the context of individual, social, and institutional identity.

***Goals and Objectives:***

The means and media for better understanding sacred communication will be reading, interpreting, analyzing, and critically evaluating various texts, handouts, images, music, and a few video presentations. Coming to understand sacred communication will be facilitated through class/group discussions. Therefore clear writing and the presentation of the ideas expressed in that writing are necessary for the achievement of goals. Clear writing will enhance peer critique and class assignment completion. The following are general goals which individuals should incorporate into the learning experience (note that each goal should be preceded by the statement "the improvement of"): reading comprehension, interpretation skills, analytical ability, critical thinking skills, evaluation of problems, ability to synthesize, clear and concise writing skills, participation in group dynamics, use of technology, individual effort toward solving a problem in the context of a group. The following goals are related to religion and our study of sacred communication (again each goal should be preceded by the statement "the improvement of"): an understanding of sacred signs and symbols, a knowledge of communication media related to religious expression, a familiarity with diverse religious cultures and their methods of communication, and an understanding of the students own religious communication practices.

In addition to the general goals listed above, the following more specific objectives will steer us through the learning process. I will list the statements below and then offer a brief explanation of each.

1. Developing the skill of clearly expressing ideas orally and in writing.
2. Gaining a broader understanding and appreciation of intellectual/cultural activity.
3. Acquiring an interest in learning more by asking questions and seeking answers.

One objective of this course is to help you develop the skill of clearly expressing your ideas orally-in the case of the traditional classroom setting-and in writing. Acquiring an understanding of religious concepts requires an ability to clearly communicate your ideas. A second objective of the course is to gain a broad understanding and appreciation of intellectual/cultural activity. In the case of the world religions, we will be attempting to understand them within the context of the intellectual and cultural activity associated with various traditions, and that tradition's mediation of a religious experience of the world. A third objective of this humanities course is that the student begins to move away from a teacher centered learning environment to the kind of learning that is driven by the student's desire to gain knowledge through discovery. Learning by discovery requires skills of asking good questions and seeking answers. This is a general education course and the student should work to sharpen skills that have been developed up to this point. A final objective of the course is that students gain skills in working in the context of a class. Much learning takes place as the student searches for knowledge while sitting quietly with a book, or through quiet reflection, or in producing a piece of writing. However, much learning also takes place in a group environment where people share ideas, critique each other's ideas, and offer constructive criticism concerning a piece of writing.

### ***Course Outline:***

- I. Defining terms and concepts.
- II. Finding a context for terminology and concepts.
- III. Sacred communication in oral religious traditions.
- IV. The rise of a written medium of sacred communication.
- V. Exploring particular sacred communication practices in contemporary religions.
- VI. The rise of an electronic medium of sacred communication.

### ***Assignments:***

First, each student will be required to write several discussion essays and keep those essays in a folder. Second, each student will write a four part research paper. Third, each student will keep a daily reading and reflection journal. Finally, each student will participate in classroom discussions. There is further discussion of these requirements below.

### **Discussion Essays:**

You will receive reading and writing assignment objectives related to the topics mentioned in the course outline and also detailed in the course reading schedule. You will respond to the assignment objectives with a concise quality essay. Each essay will provide the class with material that will add to the assignment discussion. Each essay should be between 500 and 900 words, that is about 2-4 single spaced or 3-6 double spaced pages; it is more important that the assignment topic be covered by a full discussion. Each essay will follow the MLA style manual, having a bibliography and parenthetical references. Make note of the criteria for a quality essay below.

### **Criterion for Quality Essays:**

An essay is the individual's opinion that is the result of research related to the essay objectives. A quality essay clearly addresses the assignment objectives and communicates to the reader the writer's informed opinion. It also engages the reader in a kind of conversation by inviting the reader to think and reflect upon areas of interest that the writer finds fascinating and important in relation to the original question. The writer's aim is to come to some understanding of the question and to engage the reader's attention

and thought, attempting to show the reader how the writer came to such an understanding. Understanding is attained and determined through an ability to support assertions in writing, as well as through clear illustrations and explanations. Within the essay there should be statements that are assertions as to the opinion of the individual. These assertions should be supported by statements which link the assertion to facts learned in research and/or personal experience--although personal experience used as support should be clearly qualified. It is important in supporting assertions to cite appropriate sources. Contrasting opinions and support for those opinions should be explored in order to come to better understanding in relation to the subject. That is, it is a valuable practice for the writer to consider alternative opinions before reaching any final conclusions.

### **Research Paper:**

Research papers will conform to the MLA Handbook and are to be ten pages, typed with 12 point font, double-spaced, and have a bibliography. They will be written on a topic of choice that has been approved. No two students will be allowed to write on the same topic, and topics will be assigned first come first choice. The student must have at least five bibliographic sources not including encyclopedic, dictionary, or required texts. Students may use Internet sites as a source but they will only count as one of the five required sources. The student is responsible for choosing a topic and getting it approved. The student is encouraged to write a personal reflection of at least a page within the body of the paper. Note the section on criteria of quality essays and incorporate those principles into the writing of the paper. There are four parts to this assignment: 1) Thesis statement and paragraph description of the project, 20 points; 2) Outline and bibliography, 20 points; 3) Final draft, 60 points. The thesis statement and paragraph describing the project will be submitted by the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> week. The outline and bibliography of the paper will be submitted by the 8<sup>th</sup> week. The final draft of the paper will be submitted at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> week. Your thesis, paragraph description, outline, and bibliography are to be included in a file folder that will be submitted with the final draft.

### **Thesis Statement:**

A thesis statement is a sentence that introduces the reader to both your topic and your point of view concerning that topic. In formulating your point of view make sure that you are addressing a central question or problem that your topic raises. One way to compose a thesis statement is to start with a short paragraph that describes your topic of interest and then raises some important questions that are relevant. You will have to craft that paragraph so that your choice of language highlights a topic that will peak a reader's interest, and at the same time choose questions that further draw that reader into your project. After crafting this paragraph, distill the content into a single sentence.

### **Daily Preparation and Classroom Participation:**

Reading assignments are to be completed before class time begins. A lack of preparation will affect participation in discussion. Discussion essays will be drawn from the readings. These essays will contribute to classroom discussions. If individuals are lacking in daily preparation, the class goals will not be fully realized. Part of a successful class dynamic is analysis of peer communication. Therefore an important part of daily preparation involves analysis of communication within the context of the classroom setting--whether that classroom in traditional or electronic. Persons should feel some peer motivation toward quality goal achievement. Mutual communication analysis is the means to that achievement. If the student has had a problem completing the assignment on time, the instructor should be notified prior to class thus reducing a negative effect on that grade. Although discussions will address much that is covered in the readings, they will also include information not covered in the texts. Both the instructor and the students will bring supplemental material to class. Therefore participation and attentiveness during discussions is of the utmost importance. Reading analysis is integral to quality classroom discussion. The student is encouraged to complete reading assignments even though material is not understood. Material which is unclear should be noted for classroom discussion. Material that is unclear should be noted in the body of the weekly essay, and after clarification has been made, a subsequent entry should be made in regards to the clarification. Thus some essays will included an



addendum that reflects questions which are answered. Noting material for discussion involves writing questions during study sessions. Learners who use written questions to stimulate classroom discussions will be rewarded for good classroom participation. Written questions should be incorporated into the student's essay folder. Students are held responsible for all the concepts in the reading assignments. If there are no questions asked during the discussions, it is assumed that the students understand the material completely.

### **Reading and Reflection Journal:**

Each student will engage in the practice of journaling. Your class reading and reflection journal will be compiled and kept within a file folder and must be typed. Journal entries will be considered informal writing assignments and as such will be graded more in relation to content than style. Journal entries will contain questions and answers to questions, as well as reflections which relate to daily classroom discussions, completion of exercises, and reading assignments. Any questions the student has when reading or completing assignments should be written in their journal. Reflections may relate to connections the student makes between discussions in this class and those in other classes, between arguments raised in the readings in this class and those raised in other classes or in informal conversations. Students are encouraged to apply the skills learned in this class to activities that take place outside of the class. These applications make great reflections. The student should bring the journal to class daily and ask those questions which were raised in specific journal entries. As those questions are addressed and answered in the classroom discussions, the student should make note of the discussion and answers within the journal. Each journal entry should be dated. This class journal will reflect the quality of the students daily classroom participation and completion of homework assignments, and will be graded with this in mind. The journal may be submitted for grading at several times during the course of the semester. The journal is not the same thing as a compilation of class lecture notes; it is the product of written personal reflection related to the class. A good journal will contain at least a couple of entries per week. The semester is 15 weeks.

### **Course Texts:**

#### **Required:**

Cooper, Thomas W. A Time Before Deception: Truth in Communication, Culture, and Ethics. Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 1998.

Denny, Frederick M. and Rodney L. Taylor, eds. The Holy Book in Comparative Perspective. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1985.

Eliade, Mircea. Images and Symbols. Trans. Philip Mairet. New York: Sheed & Ward, 1952.

Ong, Walter J. Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word. London: Routledge, 1982.

#### **Supplemental:**

Berger, Peter L. A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscover of the Supernatural. New York: Anchor Books, 1969.

Buber, Martin. I Thou. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Trans. Ronald G. Smith. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958.

Eliade, Mircea. Myth and Reality. Trans. Willard R. Trask. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1975.

--. The Sacred and the Profane. Trans. Willard R. Trask. San Diego: Harvest Book, 1987.

Engnell, Richard A. "Otherness and the Rhetorical Exigences of Theistic Religion." Quarterly Journal of Speech Vol. 79 (1993) 82-98.

Otto, Rudolf. The Idea of the Holy. Trans. John W. Harvey. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1958.

### **Reading for discussion and class schedule:**

The following dates are a general guideline for the class.

**First through third weeks:** Introduction, Defining important concepts, read Images and Symbols.

**Fourth week:** Introduction to sacred communication in its oral form, read Cooper, p. 1-106.

**Fifth week:** Case studies and spirituality, read Cooper p. 109-194.

**Sixth and seventh weeks:** Conceptualization of sacred communication in its oral form, read Ong p. 1-77. Introduction to sacred communication in its literate form, read Ong p. 78-138. Further contrast of oral and literate communication, narrative as a form of sacred communication, read Ong p. 139-179. Mid-Term exam.

**Eighth and Ninth weeks:** Visual sacred communication: icons, architecture, paintings, photographs, gesture, costumes, and body art, read handouts. Sacred communication in music and dance, read handouts.

**Tenth and eleventh weeks:** Introduction to specific literate forms of sacred communication: Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, read Denny and Taylor p. 1-9, 109-180. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam literature, read Denny and Taylor p. 10-62, 84-108

**Twelfth through fourteenth weeks:** The rise of electronic communication and its affect on sacred expression, read handouts. Radio, film, television, and the Internet as Sacred Communication, read handouts.

**Last week:** Summary and Final Exam.

Note that these readings are general guidelines. Weekly assignments may differ from the above schedule. If the class does deviate from the above schedule the student should make adjustments accordingly. The class will cover all of the topics mentioned above. There will be supplemental readings given online and in the classroom.

### **The Nature of Discussion:**

Discussion is the vehicle through which the participant grows in understanding. Intuition is the feeling that one has understanding of a concept or situation but that understanding has not been expressed in language. Often the attempt to set the intuition in the form of language proves difficult. Expressions abound which describe such situations, "I know it but I just can't get my thoughts into words." Integral to clear thinking is putting thought into language. If thoughts are not set in language they can not be examined. Our unexamined opinions may lead us into undesired situations. Intuition which goes unchallenged or unexamined has no basis from which to act except whim.. Once our thoughts are expressed they need support. An unsupported opinion is like a boat drifting upon the sea. In order to fully examine our thoughts they need to be supported. Once we have set thought into language and supported those opinions they are ready to be challenged. The challenge serves to expose a faulty position or a weak spot in an otherwise strong argument. Thought expressed in and supported by language, examined from every angle, and defended from a good challenge is thought that leads toward understanding. Discussion is the vehicle we will use to walk through the critical steps mentioned above. Discussion will only flourish in an atmosphere of mutual enquiry. The persons participating in this class come from diverse backgrounds but there are no experts. We begin the class in need of understanding. We will not arrive at that understanding until we have traveled together through the texts and have experienced valid discussion. There is no reason to feel intimidated about a lack of knowledge or difficulty with expression. The lack of knowledge or difficulty with expression is something that can be improved through the discussion process. Therefore, there are no "stupid" questions. Good discussion comes through mutual respect and thorough research. Since we are trying to understand sacred communication in a group atmosphere we will learn together. There "is" strength in numbers. There can also be better understanding when people help each other.

### ***General Policies:***

#### **Attendance:**

Absences beyond a minimal number may well have negative influence on a student's grade for the course. 20% of the course grade is based on classroom participation and discussion. More than three unexcused absences will result in the lowering of the participation grade by 10 points. Every unexcused absence after the fourth will result in another 5 points reduction.

### **Grading:**

The total of all discussion essays will make up 15% of the course grade. A research paper will comprise 25% of the course grade. Mid-term exam will comprise 20% and a final exam will comprise 20% of the course grade. Classroom participation will comprise 10% of the course grade. The reading and reflection journal will comprise 10% of the course grade.

### **Make-up Examinations, Late Assignments and Incompletes:**

The student has the responsibility to request any form of departure from due dates for course work and to give reasons for the request. Late or *ex post facto* requests must be supported by the most convincing reasons.

### ***Final Notes:***

#### **The CNU Honor Code**

"On my honor, I will maintain the highest possible standards of honesty, integrity and personal responsibility. That means I will not lie, cheat, or steal and as a member of this academic community, I am committed to creating an environment of respect and mutual trust."

#### **Students with Disabilities:**

If you believe that you have a disability, you should make an appointment to see me to discuss your needs. In order to receive an accommodation, your disability must be on record in Disability Services located in the Student Union, (Telephone 594-8763).

#### **Discussion Concerning Syllabus:**

The student is encouraged to discuss items within the syllabus during the introduction week. This discussion should clear up any ambiguous or vague language that may be in the syllabus document. It also serves to clarify the students understanding of course expectations, goals and direction. If the student does not have questions or comments then it will be assumed that there is understanding. Remember the nature of discussion and the dynamic between instructor/peer and peer/peer. There is no reason to feel intimidated about getting into a discussion, even about the syllabus or course objectives and procedures.

# FACULTY COUNCIL ON LIBERAL LEARNING: AREA OF INQUIRY COURSE APPROVAL FORM

## **PART A:**

Course Number and Title: RSTD 236 Sacred Communication

Department: Philosophy and Religious Studies

Date of Faculty Council Vote:

## **PART B:**

**Area of Inquiry: Check One**

- ☐ Western Traditions
- ☐ Global and Multicultural Perspectives
- ☐ Formal and Informal Reasoning
- ☐ Investigating the Natural World
- ☐ Creative Expressions
- ☒ Identity, Institutions and Societies

## **PART C:**

If course is Not Approved, additional comments may be added on the reverse side. Proposal is then to be returned to the Department that submitted it.

## **PART D:**

Organization	Signature	Date	Approve	Do Not Approve*
Liberal Learning Council				
CLAS Curr. Comm				
SofB Curr. Comm				
CLAS Dean				
SofB Dean				
UCC Chair				
Faculty Senate Pres.				

\*If “Do Not Approve”, please explain why.