

SUBJECT REVIEW REPORT

**DEPARTMENT OF PALI AND
BUDDHIST STUDIES**



**FACULTY OF ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF SRI JAYEWARDENEPURA**

7th to 9th June 2010

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CONTENTS

	Page
1. Subject Review Process	1
2. Brief History of the University, Faculty and the Dept. of Pali and Buddhist Studies	2
3. Aims and Learning Outcomes	3
3.1 Aims	3
3.2 Learning Outcomes	3
4. Findings of the Review Team	4
4.1. Curriculum Design, Content and Review	4
4.2. Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods	5
4.3. Quality of Students including Student Progress and Achievements	6
4.4. Extent and Use of Student Feedback, Qualitative and Quantitative	6
4.5. Postgraduate Studies	7
4.6. Peer Observation	7
4.7. Skills Development	7
4.8. Academic Guidance and Counseling	8
5. Conclusions	9
6. Recommendations	12

1. SUBJECT REVIEW PROCESS

The subject review evaluates the quality of education within a specific subject or discipline as well as the programs offered by an academic department. It is focused on the quality of the student learning experience and student achievement. It is designed to evaluate the quality of undergraduates. This subject review report presents the findings of the subject review assessment of the academic standards achieved and the quality of learning opportunities provided in the Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies in the Faculty of Arts of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura.

The review team consisted of Prof Ven. Kollupitiye Mahinda Sangarakkitha (University of Kelaniya) Prof. Rohana P. Mahaliyanaarachchi, (Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka), and Prof Asanga Thilakaratne (University of Colombo) during the period of 07th to 09th June, 2010.

The review was conducted adhering to the guidelines provided in the *Quality Assurance Handbook for Sri Lankan Universities*, published by the CVCD and University Grants Commission in July 2002. The review was based on the Self Evaluation Report (SER) submitted by the Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies and supported by the information provided and gathered during the three-day site visit to the Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura.

The following aspects of education/provision were considered under the review.

1. Curriculum Design, Content and Review
2. Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods
3. Quality of Students including Student Progress and Achievements
4. Extent and Use of Student Feedback
5. Postgraduate Studies
6. Peer Observation
7. Skills Development
8. Academic Guidance and Counselling

The evaluation of the eight aspects was based on:

- Meetings held with the Vice Chancellor, Dean of the Faculty, Head of Department, members of the academic staff, non-academic staff, undergraduate students representing 1st, 2nd, 3rd and final year students and postgraduate students.
- Observation of department and other facilities of the Faculty (library, lecture halls, class rooms, etc.)
- Observing classes conducted by teaching staff
- Reviewing documents maintained by the department

Each of the eight aspects was judged as ‘Good’, ‘Satisfactory’ or ‘Unsatisfactory’ paying attention to the strengths, good practices and weaknesses in each area.

2. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY, FACULTY AND THE DEPARTMENT

The Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies represents one of the oldest Departments of Study in the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, originally formed in 1959 under the name of the Vidyodaya University of Sri Lanka. The founder of the University, the Most Venerable Welivitiye Sri Soratha Nayaka Thera had the objective of making the University a center of learning on Buddhist Philosophy and Buddhist Civilization. At the inception, the University of Vidyodaya had three Faculties, i.e. Buddhism, Arts, and Languages. The Faculty of Buddhism consisted of three (03) Departments, i.e. Buddhist Culture, Theravada Buddhism, and Mahayana Buddhism. During this period, the language of Pali was offered separately under the Faculty of Languages. In addition to that, Buddhist Culture was offered as a compulsory subject for every student of the Faculty of Arts, and it has been continued up to date. Proudly, the Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies has been given the sole responsibility on that subject as well.

In 1960, the Higher Education Act No 20 was passed, and accordingly, the National Higher Education Board was established. In 1967, the decision was taken to abolish the Faculty of Religious Studies and the Departments held under the Faculty were combined with the Faculty of Buddhism. Accordingly, Theravada Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, Buddhist Culture, Indian Philosophy, Western Philosophy, and Psychology too were offered by the Faculty of Buddhism. The first Dean of the Faculty of Buddhism (in 1967) was the Most Venerable Kotagama Vacissara Thera. After his sudden demise, Professor W.G. Balagalla was appointed as the Dean of the Faculty.

In the year 1972, the University of Ceylon Act No.1 was passed and dramatic changes occurred in the whole University system in Sri Lanka. However, it must be noted that a significant disrespect and drawback was brought upon the studies related to Buddhism, for which, a separate Faculty had been established since the inception of the university. The recommendations made by the above act are as follows:

- I. The Vidyodaya University became the Vidyodaya Campus of the University of Sri Lanka.
- II. The Faculty of Buddhism and the Faculty of Languages were abolished.
- III. The Faculty of Arts was established with five Departments, i.e. Economics, Geography, History, Sinhala, and the Department of Languages and Cultural Studies.
- IV. Significantly, no Department was established for Buddhism, which had received a Faculty status from the inception of the University.
- V. In contrast, Buddhist studies were placed as a sub- department under the Department of Languages and Cultural Studies.

In 1978, the University Act No.16 was passed and the independent University status was restored, then converting the University of the Vidyodaya Campus into the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. As a result of this Act, the Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies was established in 1980 as an independent Department.

3. AIMS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

3.1 Aims

The main goal of the Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies is to produce self-confident graduates, intellectuals, academics endowed with in-depth knowledge, critical and analytical understanding, sharp logical competence, and broad linguistic training and application on Buddhism and related disciplines.

Accordingly, the Department aims to provide:

- A high quality degree program which enables students to fulfill the demands of the Modern Society.
- Opportunities to enhance research skills and personal development.
- Assistance to acquire an authentic, systematic and critical awareness of Buddhism and related disciplines including philosophy and psychology.
- Opportunity to create graduates endowed with talented skills in seeking amicable solutions to acute problems and dilemmas faced by the modern society.
- Training to teach and impart the Buddhist doctrine in an effective way.
- An excellent opportunity to acquire the most up to date knowledge of religion, philosophy, psychology, and in particular, of Buddhism.
- A range of challenging learning opportunities to study Buddhism comparatively, and in the light of modern discoveries of knowledge.

3.2 Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of any of the degree programs offered by the Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies, the students should have:

- Acquired in-depth knowledge of the respective discipline studied.
- Acquired an authentic, systematic and critical foundation to study any discipline including religion and philosophy.
- Learnt how to conduct extensive research on certain issues studied.
- Developed learning and teaching skills pertaining to study of religion and philosophy.
- Realized the uniqueness of Buddhist doctrine in the whole history of mankind in seeking new knowledge with freedom of thought.
- Acquired talented skills in seeking amicable solutions to both individual and social problems.

4. FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW TEAM

4.1. Curriculum Design, Content and Review

The Pali and Buddhist Studies Department has four programs in it, namely, (i) Buddhist philosophy, (ii) Buddhist civilization, (iii) Pali and (iv) philosophy and psychology.

Pali had been under languages earlier. Currently it is being taught as a part of Buddhist studies. Since Pali cannot be separated from Buddhist studies, and since Pali in real sense is supportive for Buddhist studies it is understandable why it has been joined with Buddhist studies. Underlying the significance of Pali, the department itself is called 'Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies'.

The courses in the Pali subject are arranged in such a way that the main aspects of the subject are covered. It is a good feature that prakrit studies have been included in the study of Pali. An overall weakness of the syllabus is that there are many overlaps. For example, all four 1st year courses (Pali 1101: Grammar of Pali language I; Pali 1102: prescribed texts; Pali 1203: Study of Pali literature; and Pali 1204: Practice of Pali language) seem to overlap with one another. The courses need to be focused so that overlapping is made minimum.

Buddhist Philosophy and Buddhist Civilization are the major focus of the department. The arrangement and the quality of the courses in general are good. The syllabi cover the standard aspects of the subjects. Despite this general observation, there are several areas to be improved in the syllabi. For example, in Buddhist civilization it was noted that Buddhist art was not adequately covered.

Philosophy and Psychology are taken together and taught as one subject. Students who choose to study this subject are taught courses in both philosophy and psychology, and on the conclusion of their program they get a degree in both philosophy and psychology. This is unheard of in our university system!

The courses are designated as PHPY indicating the combination of both Philosophy and psychology. But this makes it very hard, especially for beginners, to distinguish between the two subjects. PHPY 2204: Sexuality and Society does not seem to fall within either philosophy or psychology. Nevertheless, judging by the number of students enrolled (2004/5: 246, 2005/6: 293, 2006/7: 291), the course unit looks popular.

The combined subject of philosophy and psychology seems to have some serious problems. Currently psychology and philosophy are taught as aspects of one undergraduate degree program. The students who follow this program receive their degree in both subjects. We see several weaknesses in this arrangement.

A major weakness is that due to this combination neither subject is treated adequately. In the current program, psychology has been allocated 12 course units and philosophy 09 units. Clearly everything that ideally needs to be included in standard psychology or philosophy courses is not included. Consequently students get only a partial knowledge in these subjects. Certain course units had too large a content to cover within the time limit of one semester PHPY 2101 (Greek and Modern Western Philosophy) can be cited as an example. It is hard to imagine how one can teach even the main figures and movements of Greek philosophy and the standard philosophers who are dealt with in any course covering modern western philosophy.

The course on higher order logic (PHPY 4205) does not cover anything that can properly be described as higher order logic. The very syllabus demonstrates lack of knowledge in the subject.

It is incomprehensible how students can get a first degree in two major subjects by studying each subject only partially. The standard way to teach two subjects at the first degree level is to have double major with provision for students to spend one extra year. It is unlikely that the present system of our country can provide for such a double degree program.

What is clear is serious lack of professionalism and consequent disregard for the boundaries of different disciplines. Ultimately it is the students who are not guided in either subject properly, suffer. Given the fact that this is a popular course with a large number of students the situation is even more potentially harmful. Taking corrective measures is of vital importance.

It was clear that there were not enough teachers to teach the two subjects. The professor who heads this particular program has his MA from a philosophy department in a theme related to psychology. All four teachers in the program have their training in philosophy. None have an academic degree in psychology although even courses on abnormal psychology (PHPY 2102) and psychological treatment (PHPY 4220) are taught by some of them. The department relies heavily on visiting lecturers. It was reported by students that the attendance of visiting lecturers was poor and irregular.

We propose for the sake of the good name of the university and the department and the welfare of the students (i) that these two subjects need to be separated, (ii) that a set qualified teachers should be hired to teach psychology, and that (iii) the two subjects should be taught only by teachers who are professionally qualified to do so.

The review team is of the view that the aspect of Curriculum Design, Content and Review would be judged as 'GOOD'.

4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods

The academic staff of the Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies consists of 01 Professor, 04 Senior Lecturers, and 07 (Probationary) Lecturers and 04 Tutors. Hence it has sufficient number of qualified academic staff. It also obtains assistance from a number of well qualified visiting lecturers. The dedication and commitment of the lecturers are noteworthy. In the lessons observed by the reviewers, it was noted that the teachers were well prepared for lessons. Some improvements are possible especially if the classrooms and lecture theatres had better teaching facilities such as multimedia projectors, public address systems and comfortable seating facilities. The rooms seemed to be somewhat cramped up with students' seating arrangements giving no space for the teacher to move around for better access. The teaching was somewhat teacher centered (what was observed) and more interactive approaches would be helpful in learning.

The main teaching method used is class lectures. Other than this teachers use other different teaching and learning methods such as presentations, tutorial classes, etc., However these interactive teaching-learning environments can be improved further by using methods such as role plays, case studies etc.

There is a substantial collection of subject related books in the library. In addition there are local and international journals available for the readers. There is sufficient number of seats available in the library for the readers to utilize the library.

The students are provided with both computer and internet facilities by the faculty computer centre. The number of computers at present appeared to be too low to cater to the demand. This would increase in the future. Hence it would be necessary to upgrade the facilities at the computer centre.

End semester examinations along with the continuous assessments are used to assess students. The continuous assessments are mainly in the form of (individual /group) assignments with or without oral presentations. Maximum upper limits of allocation of marks for end semester examination and CA were maintained. The end semester examination papers were of the same duration even though the credit load of courses was different. This might need some rethinking in order to have a better assessment policy.

All students undertake a research project in the final semester. This gives students the necessary analytical and synthesizing skill development before graduating.

Considering the above facts, the aspect of Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods is judged as 'GOOD'.

4.3 Quality of Students, Student Progress and Achievements

The undergraduates joining the Faculty of Arts have a wide range in the "Z score" value. The students who have followed Art subjects for the A/L and scored marks to the relevant step of Z- Score are selected by the University Grants Commission and proceeded to the university.

Students those who expect to follow a special degree course in Pali, Buddhist Civilization, Buddhist Philosophy or Philosophy and Psychology should have obtained at least a B pass for the respective course unit recommended for the first year examination and they should not have taken "D or E" for any course unit in the first year examination.

Though the students' attendance at lectures is recorded they are hardly used to monitor and guide the students' progress. The members of the staff believe that majority of the graduates of the department are able to secure jobs especially as school teachers when they graduate. The department has not made sufficient effort to record these data or information. It would be good if the department develops this method and a proper data base in this regard so that these tracer studies could be used to the department's advantage in the future when securing projects for the specialization students.

The students are somewhat capable in communicating in English but improvement is possible. The students in this department do not have a personality development program and it would be to their advantage if the department can develop such a program.

When the above facts are considered the aspect of the Quality of Students, Student Progress and Achievements could be judged as 'GOOD'.

4.4 Extent and Use of Student Feedback

The department has very recently introduced a method to obtain student feedback regarding the quality of teaching. The lecturers of the department obtain students' feedback by using a format.

This feedback is taken couple of days before the review has undertaken. Therefore reviewers cannot make a judgment on the quality of the students feedback. The reviewers suggested that if a feedback is taken around 1/3 – 1/2 of the course then it would be more formative and would give the teacher an opportunity to adjust if necessary for the remainder of the semester. The information collected are not analysed by the lecturers and not used for the improvement of the quality of teaching and lecturers.

When the above facts are considered the aspect of the extent and use of student feedback, qualitative and quantitative could be judged as 'UNSATISFACTORY'.

4.5. Postgraduate Studies

The Department offers several postgraduate programmes leading to the Degrees of Master of Art (M.A.), Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.) and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) by research in all four study areas. There is a separate faculty for postgraduate studies in the university. Those postgraduate courses are administered by this faculty. Senior members of the staff have been appointed as supervisors for the postgraduate students.

Some students have been supervised by external experts in the related field. There are forty six graduate students. The Review Team met some of those students. They are happy about their supervisors. Generally they seem to be well guided and highly motivated.

Most of them have selected rare topics with potentials for further research.

According to postgraduate students the performance of faculty of postgraduate studies is insufficient. The faculty has very slow registration process. In some cases, getting approval for research proposal takes many months.

When the above facts are considered the aspect of the Postgraduate Studies could be judged as ‘SATISFACTORY’.

4.6. Peer Observation

It was observed that the overall attitude of the academic staff members regarding the peer observation is positive. It was revealed that, an attempt has been made recently to develop a mechanism for peer observation in the department. However, a formal format is not available at the department for the peer evaluation purposes. It is a current need to introduce formal structured format for peer evaluation. It seems that this process could be improved for the benefit of the students and the teachers of the whole institute. Nevertheless, self driven efforts to identify his/her own strengths and weaknesses in teaching also have been carried out by some staff members in the department in this regard. The existing practice with regard to peer observation in the departments is good but improvement is needed.

All final examination question papers are moderated by senior academic staff members and answer scripts are evaluated by two examiners, which are also considered as a good way of peer evaluation.

When the above facts are considered the aspect of the Peer Observation could be judged as ‘SATISFACTORY’.

4.7. Skills Development

The Department has taken several steps to improve subject specific and generic skills of their students. Their curricular structure has been well designed and due to that reason students could enhance theoretical, conceptual and critical knowledge in related to their subjects. Taking Pali as a subject, the students have attained a high level of efficiency in understanding Pali Canonical Texts and their commentaries.

The students are supervised to conduct independent research studies. The departmental publications such as ‘Magadhi’ and ‘Chintana’ have provided opportunities to publish that research articles. This has helped the students to improve their writing skills.

English language proficiency and IT knowledge are provided at department and faculty level. The Review Team observed that the students were keen to obtain practical training outside the university whereby more employment potential would be generated.

The students are given opportunities to improve their skills in communication in English language and to develop computer and IT skills. However, introduction of more IT related courses would be beneficial in future curriculum revisions since this would also enable more student centred learning.

Assignments and presentations have been designed to improve teamwork, communication and presentation skills of the students. IT skills and ability to handle computer software can be improved through introducing computer related course units in the curriculum. Communication skills in English language can be developed further through organizing of student activities.

There are other skills that need to be identified and developed gradually among the undergraduates. Critical thinking and analytical skills are examples of such skills which should be taken into account.

When the above facts are considered the aspect of the Skills Development could be judged as 'SATISFACTORY'.

4.8. Academic Guidance and Counseling

No staff member from the department have and do serve as student counsellors for the faculty. It would be beneficial for the department to have all senior lecturers trained in a student counselling program as this would assist to build up a good rapport between teachers and students.

A faculty handbook is made available to the undergraduates at the commencement of the degree program. An orientation program is organised to familiarise new students to the university environment every year. It would be helpful for the department to hold meetings with their students and maintain a close rapport with them in relation to selection of their courses and other academic requirements. Also it would be good if the department can encourage their students to actively take part in extracurricular activities.

When the above facts are considered the aspect of the Academic Guidance and Counselling could be judged as 'UNSATISFACTORY.'

Based on the observations made during the study visit by the review team, the eight aspects were judged as follows:

Aspect Reviewed	Judgment Given
Curriculum Design, Content and Review	Good
Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods	Good
Quality of Students including Student Progress and Achievements	Good
Extent and Use of Student feedback, Qualitative and Quantitative	Unsatisfactory
Postgraduate Studies	Satisfactory
Peer Observation	Satisfactory
Skills Development	Satisfactory
Academic Guidance and Counseling	Unsatisfactory

5. CONCLUSIONS

1. Curriculum Design, Content and Review

Strengths:

- Follow semester, credit and GPA system
- Have both general degree program and specialization program
- Curriculum has been regularly reviewed- academia and professionals have been involved
- The courses in the Pali subject are arranged in such a way that the main aspects of the subject are covered. It is a good feature that prakrit studies have been included in the study of Pali.
- The arrangement and the quality of the courses in general is good.

Weaknesses:

- An overall weakness of the syllabus is that there are many overlaps. For example, all four 1st year courses (Pali 1101: Grammar of Pali language I; Pali 1102: prescribed texts; Pali 1203: Study of Pali literature; and Pali 1204: Practice of Pali language) seem to overlap with one another.
- **Philosophy and Psychology** are taken together and taught as one subject. Students who choose to study this subject are taught courses in both philosophy and psychology, and on the conclusion of their program they get a degree in both philosophy and psychology. This is unheard of in our university system!
- A major weakness is that due to combination of **Philosophy and Psychology** neither subject is treated adequately. In the current program, psychology has been allocated 12 course units and philosophy 09 units. Clearly everything that ideally needs to be included in standard psychology or philosophy courses is not included. Consequently students get only a partial knowledge in these subjects.
- Certain course units had too large a content to cover within the time limit of one semester PHPY 2101 (Greek and Modern Western Philosophy) can be cited as an example.
- There were not enough teachers to teach the two subjects **Philosophy and Psychology**

- The department relies heavily on visiting lecturers. It was reported by students that the attendance of visiting lecturers was poor and irregular.

2. Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods

Strengths:

- The department has qualified teaching staff.
- Knowledge delivery methods that are being adopted are good.
- Use of GPA system for students assessment
- Use of continuous assessment (CA) and end semester exams for student assessment
- There is a substantial collection of subject related books in the library.

Weaknesses:

- No weight has been given for different academic years or semesters in FGPA calculation (eg. 20% for 1st and 2nd years and 30% for 3rd and 4th years)
- More teacher centred education system
- The temperature in the class rooms tended to increase making students uncomfortable particularly when the student numbers were high creating a non conducive learning environment.
- No adequate class rooms for delivering lecturers.

3. Quality of Students, Students Progress and Achievement

Strengths:

- The pass rate of the students who specialized in the department is higher.
- A substantial of the students continue in postgraduate education
- Student selection criteria to the department is good.

Weaknesses:

- Less number of students obtain first class or second upper class passes
- Most students were poor in English. Students should be directed to learn comparatively more English.

4. Extent and Use of Student Feedback

Strengths:

- Teachers commenced recently to obtain students feedback by using a standard format

Weaknesses:

- Students feedback has been taken at the end of the semester, not at the mid of the semester – thus it does not provide an opportunity to improve in the same semester for the benefit of the students
- Teachers do not use results of the analysis of students feedback for improvement of teaching method

5. Postgraduate Studies

Strengths:

- Number of postgraduate degree programs including PhD programs appeared highly satisfactory when compared to the facilities available.
- Postgraduate programs are conducted well and appeared to be completed within the stipulated time period.
- All the postgraduate students were highly satisfied with their programs and had confidence in the staff.

Weaknesses:

- Scholarships or assistantships for full time postgraduate students are limited.

6. Peer Observation

Strengths:

- There is a standard format to obtain peer observation
- Examination papers are moderated and second marked by senior staff

Weaknesses:

- Peer observation is not done on a regular basis by all the lecturers. No formal mechanism has been developed to evaluate the teaching skills of the staff members by the senior academics or competent out side personnel.
- No evidence about the analysis of the peer observation data and follow-up action

7. Skills Development

Strengths:

- Research project in the final semester affords development of many transferable skills in addition to subject matter skills

Weaknesses:

- No personality development course or program is available
- Less number of computers for students to improve their ICT skills
- Students English language speaking skills are not up to standard

8. Academic Guidance and Counseling

Strengths:

- Orientation programs, student hand book and course outlines are available

Weaknesses:

- No proper training has been given to academic counsellors
- Academic counselling regarding selection of specialization is not adequate
- An academic advisor is not properly assigned to each student
- Student counselling hours are not properly allocated and no specific Centre is available for counselling activities

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. An immediate curriculum review and revision is needed. The number of credits of the total curriculum to be revised to the International accepted norms.
2. The syllabi of all four subjects need to be reviewed by subject specialists to begin with, and subsequently this good practice needs to be repeated in every 05 years or so.
3. While we recommend review generally for all subjects, specifically the syllabi of Pali and philosophy and psychology have to be reviewed without exception.
4. Teachers must be professionally qualified to teach what they are assigned to teach.
5. Since it is unimaginable that one can teach any subject adequately without proficiency in an international language, all those who lack such proficiency must be given opportunity to acquire that proficiency.
6. The duration of the end semester question papers (essay type) to be according to the number of credits of the course
7. Extra-curricular activities should also be paid attention to in the process of skill development.
8. Increase the number of computers for students. It should be as 6:1 Student: computer ratio.
9. Provide training on 'academic counselling and guiding' for academic counsellors.
10. Strengthen the Alumni Association of the department.
11. Collaborate with the ELTU in designing curricula for English courses offered by the department and make arrangements to improve English language skills among weaker students.
12. Need to maintain a database on the progress made by students during their course of studies and also their employability after the graduation.
13. Introduce a formal mechanism for peer observation.
14. Create a research culture within the department by encouraging young academics to do research in their specialty areas.
15. Facilities should be created to learn more languages like Tibetan and Chinese
16. An opportunity should be provided to practise meditation.
17. For post graduate students, research methodology course should be introduced.