

ASSESSMENT PLAN - DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Professors Naylor, Upson-Saia and Wright - February 2008

MISSION STATEMENT:

The Department of Religious Studies seeks to cultivate students' understanding of religion as a significant, widespread and diverse human phenomenon. To this end courses explore the literature, history, institutions and practices of some of the world's major religious traditions. Special attention is given to the relation between religion and culture and their mutual influence and impact.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES FOR RELIGIOUS STUDIES STUDENTS:

- 1. To learn to read, write, speak and think clearly, analytically and critically.**
 - a. Students can write effective analytical essays and research papers.
 - b. Students can articulate ideas clearly in small groups and in public presentations.
 - c. Students can read a wide range of religious texts with retention and critical, analytical comprehension.

- 2. To develop knowledge of religious traditions and issues that is broad and diverse, while at the same time cultivating knowledge in one area of specialty.**
 - a. Students can describe and compare several religious traditions, movements and issues.
 - b. Students can describe and analyze in detail the workings of a specific religious tradition, group, movement or issue.

- 3. To examine the complex relationships between religion and culture in multi-cultural and cross-cultural contexts.**
 - a. Students can identify, analyze and compare the influence of culture on religious texts, rites, beliefs and ethics.
 - b. Students can identify, analyze and compare the influence of religion on social structures, practices and values.

- 4. To understand the variety of approaches to the academic study of religion and the value and limitations of their distinct perspectives.**
 - a. Students can evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of theories and methods for the study of religion.
 - b. Students can select and apply the theoretical approach that is best suited to the study of a particular religious phenomenon and give justification for their choice.

- 5. To apply the understanding gained by the academic study of religion to a wide variety of contemporary concerns.**
 - a. Students can make thoughtful connections between religious theories and traditions and a wide variety of contemporary social and cultural concerns.

Religious Studies Department Assessment Course/Program Alignment

	Outcome 1a	Outcome 1b	Outcome 1c	Outcome 2a	Outcome 2b	Outcome 3a	Outcome 3b	Outcome 4a	Outcome 4b	Outcome 5a	
RELS 130: Judaism as a Religious Civilization	I		I	I	I	I	I			I	exams, research paper
RELS 150: Introduction to Islam	I		I		I	I	I	I		I	final exam, research project
RELS 160: Introduction to Asian Religions	I	I	I	I	I	I	I				exams, essays
RELS 175: World of NT	I		I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	overall exam grades; exam essay questions & short response papers; debates
RELS 190: History Early Christianity	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I			exam essay questions; students presentations (handouts, recordings)
RELS 225: Sufism	I	I	I		I	I	I	I	I	I	student presentations
RELS 237: The Holocaust: Historical and Religious Perspectives	D		D	D	D	D	D			D	exams, research paper
RELS 240: Religion and Social Reform	I	I	I	I	I	I	I				student presentations, exam essay questions

I - Introduced
D - Developed
M - Mastered

Religious Studies Department Assessment Course/Program Alignment

	Outcome 1a	Outcome 1b	Outcome 1c	Outcome 2a	Outcome 2b	Outcome 3a	Outcome 3b	Outcome 4a	Outcome 4b	Outcome 5a	
RELS 242: Environmental Ethics and Religion	D	D	D	D	D	D	D				research paper, student presentations
RELS 245: African American Religious Traditions	D	D	D	D	D	D	D				student presentations, final exams, quizzes
RELS 250: Interpreting Religion	D	D	D		D			D	D		student presentations (handouts, recordings); final research paper
RELS 251: What is Enlightenment?	D	D	D	D	D	D	D			D	exams, papers, student presentations
RELS 260: Buddhist Thought From India to Japan	D	D	D	D	D	I	I	I		I	exams, papers, in-class research presentations, participation in discussions
RELS 265: History of Chinese Thought	D	D	D	D	D	I	I	I		I	exams, papers, in-class research presentations, participation in discussions
RELS 275: Movements in Judaism	D	D	D	D	D	D	D				periodic exams, presentations
RELS 285: Contemporary Religious Thought	M	M	M		M	M	M	M	M	M	presentations, periodic exams

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Religious Studies Department Assessment Course/Program Alignment

	Outcome 1a	Outcome 1b	Outcome 1c	Outcome 2a	Outcome 2b	Outcome 3a	Outcome 3b	Outcome 4a	Outcome 4b	Outcome 5a	material to assess
RELS 290: Banned Books: NT Apoc	D	D	D	I	D	D	D			D	student presentations (handouts, recordings); final research paper
RELS 310: Comparative Religion/Theory of Religion	D	D	D	M	M	D	D	D	D	D	participation in discussions and debates, essays
RELS 340: American Religion: Communities and Movements	D	D	D	D	D	D	D				research paper
RELS 344: History of Religion at Occidental	D		D		D	D	D				final research paper
RELS 345: American Spiritualities	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	M	student presentations, research paper
RELS 347: Religion and the U.S. Supreme Court	D	D	D	D	D	D	D			M	student presentations, follow up paper on court case
RELS 350: History of Christian Sexual Ethics	D	D	D		D	D	D			D	short response papers, final oral presentation (handouts, recordings)
RELS 365: Seminar: Buddhist Ethics	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	D	D	M	participation in discussions and debates, essays, research presentations

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Religious Studies Department Assessment Course/Program Alignment

	Outcome 1a	Outcome 1b	Outcome 1c	Outcome 2a	Outcome 2b	Outcome 3a	Outcome 3b	Outcome 4a	Outcome 4b	Outcome 5a	
RELS 375: The Moral Life: Nietzsche and Heidegger	M	M	M	M	M	M	M			M	final research paper
RELS 390: Topics in Religious Studies	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	presentations
RELS 490 Senior Seminar	M		M		M	M	M		M	M	annotated bibliographies, comps outlines

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Implementation of Assessment:

All tenured and tenure-track faculty in Religious Studies will meet at the end of each academic year to engage in formal assessment, following the schedule for assessment stipulated above. Materials used in assessment will vary each year in accordance with the assessment topic. Faculty in Religious Studies will produce a narrative summary of our findings at the end of each assessment year, using this summary to reshape our educational program and methods in subsequent academic years. In addition to the following cycle of assessment, faculty will meet annually at the end of the academic year to evaluate the success of the senior seminar (RELS 490) and the senior comprehensive projects for that year, using materials that seem appropriate to that year.

In 2007-08 (assessing goal 2, outcomes a and b) faculty in Religious Studies will each review essays and exams from one of their courses in order to evaluate the extent to which student work demonstrates satisfactory breadth of knowledge as well as the capacity for focused analysis on one religious text or tradition. We will gather materials from four courses—randomly selecting eight exams and essays from each course—and attempt to rank them on a 4 point scale where 1 is educationally underdeveloped for this level, 2 is minimally satisfactory, 3 shows considerable ability and comprehension, and 4 indicates excellence—having met our highest expectations for undergraduate competence.

In 2008-09 (assess 1 b and 5 a), we will gather materials related to small group activities and student oral presentations in order to work towards clearer guidelines for these activities and more effective pedagogical results. In assessing 5.a, we will examine course essays to determine how far students have been able to make a mental connection between their studies and contemporary social/cultural concerns. Other assessment materials to be used include essay exam questions, essay prompts, research papers, short response papers, comprehensive papers, student handouts and recordings.

In 2009-10 (assess 3 a + b) At the end of the academic year all faculty will pull sample essays and final exams from the courses taught during that year which most directly target the goal and these particular outcomes. Reading selections from these materials, each professor will rate the degree to which students have met outcomes A and B on a scale of 1 – 4, as indicated above.

In 2010-11 (assess 1 a + c): For outcome A (writing) faculty will each randomly select 8 analytical and research papers from that academic year in order to examine the extent to which students in our classes have met this goal. Discussing these result in relation to senior comprehensive projects, we will evaluate whether senior majors in RS have succeeded in accumulating these skills through the sequence of our courses. Outcome C will be assessed by each professor in relation to final exam outcomes by examining responses to exam essay prompts that focus on reading comprehension of religious texts. Each professor will review 10 randomly selected exams in order to determine where strengths and weaknesses are to be found, and where to focus future pedagogical attention.

In 2011-12 we will assess categories 4 a and b—students ability to understand the variety of approaches to the study of religion. This assessment will focus on the degree of success in our new “methods” course, inaugurated in 2007-08 has affected work done by RS majors in other courses. We will examine Religious Studies Comprehensive Projects for the year and evaluate the extent to which students have understood and used a range of methodological alternatives in their work. We will then look at course work from relevant courses and attempt to understand what level of methodological competence should be expected in these courses and how best to provide instruction in them.