

Annual Assessment Report

Department: Religious Studies

Academic Year: 2016-17

Date of Submission: September 15, 2017

Department Chair: Telford Work

I. Response to the previous year PRC's recommendations

Summarize collected evidence in relation to each PLO in future reports.	Response: See appendices.
Show percentage of students fulfilling the established benchmarks in relation to each PLO.	Response: In 2017 assessment, 100% of majors met “Satisfactory” and “Good” level in direct assessment of actual student work; 100% of majors met “Satisfactory” and 83% met “Good” levels in their own self-assessment.
More substantive analysis of student learning in Common Context and, perhaps, other General Education courses. For example, request that all students complete at least one Scripture course during their first year, and two Scripture courses by the end of their sophomore year?	Response: CUPA assessment will happen in 2018-19. In the meantime, students already generally do complete one IOT or INT course in their first year and both by the end of their second, unless major or other commitments interfere, and we are content with that arrangement and with maintaining student flexibility.
Continue exploring different graduate school programs in order to keep abreast with a rapidly changing educational landscape and better advise your students seeking graduate degrees.	Response: The department offered a roundtable discussion of seminary and graduate school education in ministry and theology for majors, minors, and prospective majors and minors on April 26, 2017. We prepared for the discussion by updating ourselves on the widely unfolding changes in seminary requirements and program structures.
Notes: Assessment items such as PLOs, curriculum map, multi-year assessment plan, etc. are unchanged from our 2016 Six-Year Report.	

II A. Program Learning Outcome (PLO) assessment

If your department participated in the ILO assessment you may use this section to report on your student learning in relation to the assessed ILO. The assessment data can be requested from the Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness.

Program Learning Outcome	Theological Judgment
Who is in Charge /Involved?	Telford Work and Holly Beers
Direct Assessment Methods	RS-180 essay due May 2017
Indirect Assessment Methods	RS-180 focus group self-assessment at final meeting, May 2017
Major Findings	<p>Faculty assessment average: 3.4, as follows: 0 @ 0 “insufficient”, 0 @ 1 “minimal”, 0 @ 2 “satisfactory”, 7 @ 3 “good”, 5 @ 4 “superior”. All students met benchmarks of 90% @ 2 and 50% @ 3.</p> <p>Student self-assessment average: 3.1, as follows: 0 @ 0, 0 @ 1, 2 @ 2, 7 @ 3, 3 @ 4.</p> <p>Focus group responses are listed below, along with department interpretations.</p> <p><i>*Note: The rubric used by students had the 2012 version’s labels rather than the 2016 version’s “insufficient, initial, emerging, developed, and highly developed,” so this report uses those.</i></p>
Closing the Loop Activities	<p>Advance expectations and benchmarks were met.</p> <p>Faculty is continuing to explore the question of whether to increase exposure to theology in major core courses.</p>
<p>Collaboration and Communication</p> <p>Work and Beers met to analyze and interpret direct and indirect assessment from the perspective of our semester-long exposure to our graduating majors, to collect impressions (from them and us) wider in scope than this year’s PLO, and to formulate suggestions for the department to discuss in 2017 and as we refine our 2017 action plan.</p>	

III. Follow-ups

Program Learning Outcome or Key Question	<p>As listed in the six-year report:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>How do we build a robust major that attracts more students?</i> 2. <i>How do we reconfigure our understanding of Ecclesial Engagement or expand it to include global church realities and non-Christian religions?</i> 3. <i>How do we balance academic rigor with the development of Christian affections, spirituality, and practice?</i> 4. <i>Should we reconfigure religious studies curriculum into “concentrations” or “tracks”?</i> 5. <i>Regarding sustainability, how do we most effectively meet General Education requirements (Common Context courses) and teach major courses so that we can pique the interest of students who do not want to take Common Context courses?</i>
Who was involved in implementation?	<p>In spring 2017, Charlie Farhadian (chair); in fall 2017, Telford Work (chair).</p>
What was decided or addressed?	<p>Questions 1 and 3 were addressed indirectly in graduating-senior focus groups in May 2017. Our six-year report was written and reviewed as the department was replacing our Gundry Chair of Biblical Studies. The department decided in consultation with administrators that six-year-report action items would be formulated once that transition was complete. Sandy Richter’s transition into the Gundry Chair is nearing completion as of this report deadline.</p> <p>An agenda item in the department’s first meeting in September 2017 concerned planning more definitive conversations for later this semester.</p>
How were the recommendations implemented?	<p>Regarding questions 2 and 3, in 2016-17 the department repeatedly encouraged one another to highlight more faculty testimonies, personal narratives, and personal experiences demonstrating ecclesial engagement.</p> <p>Question 5 is reflected in conscious department support for offerings geared toward students beyond majors (for instance, in off-campus programs, Hebrew and Greek courses, film studies courses, etc.) and in non-RS courses (for instance, first year seminars on and off campus, Westmont Downtown, etc.). RS faculty are engaged in all of these in 2017-18.</p> <p>Question 5 was also followed through in Charles Farhadian’s offering of a first-year seminar, “Christianity 101,” in fall 2017.</p>
<p>Collaboration and Communication</p> <p>Action items “close the loop” on these key questions, in fall 2017, the department will meet and solicit input from off-campus faculty members to consider action items and key questions, then delegate to a subcommittee the task of formulating action items. Finally we will circulate and finalize its proposed list and language.</p>	

Our external reviewer Tim Willis questioned the wisdom of restricting our data-gathering to RS-180, as it shows us only student knowledge at the end of their careers rather than the before-after change over the course of their time in the major. He suggested assessment in the scripture-specific GE courses. However, students may begin taking upper-division RS courses before finishing their IOT or INT courses. Moreover, some formally declare their major well before or well after they have started major-specific courses, and there are no sophomore- or junior-specific courses to use as baselines. Our exit focus group gives us indirect assessment data as students self-report on the courses that were most influential and where their learning has happened. We believe our indirect assessment information is sufficient.

Program Learning Outcome or Key Question	External review of our six-year report included several recommendations for matters to consider.
Who was involved in implementation?	In fall 2017, Charlie Farhadian and Telford Work (former and current chairs).
What was decided or addressed?	<p>1. Our reviewer questioned the wisdom of restricting our data-gathering to RS-180, as it shows us only student knowledge at the end of their careers rather than the before-after change over the course of their time in the major. He suggested assessment in the scripture-specific GE courses. However, students may begin taking upper-division RS courses before finishing their IOT or INT courses. Moreover, some formally declare their major well before or well after they have started major-specific courses, and there are no sophomore- or junior-specific courses to use as baselines. Our exit focus group gives us indirect assessment data as students self-report on the courses that were most influential and where their learning has happened. We believe our indirect assessment information is sufficient.</p> <p>2. Our reviewer also recommended more general, less technical language for our PLOs for pedagogical purposes. He seems to have been under the impression that articulating our PLOs would “help students see the overall cohesiveness of the department’s objectives.” However, our PLOs are not a complete picture of our objectives; they are merely the aspects we have decided to assess. So emphasizing them throughout the program would tend to magnify their importance on both student and faculty imaginations and diminish the importance of unassessed goals. We emphasize our PLOs in common language unsystematically, where they surface in our courses, as well as emphasizing other aspirations and emphases that are not subject to assessment. It is at the end of the program that we explicate them (see appendix A).</p>

	<p>3. Our reviewer addressed the issue of whether the major ought to feature more ‘practical theology.’ We raised the issue in our exit focus group as part of our indirect assessment (and sensed its resonance long before in our seminar discussions). Students would in fact like more of <i>everything</i> in our major, from practice in activities such as preaching and internships to further academic exposure in theology, biblical studies, and church history. These graduating students could not name an area to cut in order to make room for more of what they wanted. Faculty will seek individually to incorporate activities and assignments that provide both practical and theoretical experience.</p> <p>4. Our reviewer was concerned that the extent of faculty availability to individual students and engagement with our global plank, specifically through off-campus programs and international research and teaching, was unsustainable and liable to overextension and burnout. He could have added further dimensions, from on-campus invitations to teach and participate in special events to admissions efforts, report writing, committee and task force work, summer teaching, interdisciplinary courses, local community service and voluntarism, and so on. He suggested RS faculty conversations along those lines.</p> <p>5. Our reviewer supported our ongoing efforts to develop some kind of ‘community space’ in or around Porter Center for peer and faculty-student interaction.</p>
<p>How were the recommendations implemented?</p>	<p>1-2 do not warrant further implementation.</p> <p>4. Our old and new chairs have had several of these conversations about expectations one-on-one, believing that such conversations are especially helpful for tenure-track and new faculty. We may be able to have a department-wide conversation along these lines—though not surprisingly our meeting time is overscheduled with ongoing department business and we already have to schedule additional meetings to follow through with items arising in the assessment process.</p> <p>5. We will continue our appeals for a community space (preferably a deck) around Porter Center.</p>
<p>Collaboration and Communication</p> <p>Item 3 is under consideration as an action item as we examine the key question of the major’s structure and appeal.</p>	

VI. Appendices

A. Prompts or instruments used to collect the data

Research, Preaching, and Reflection Project

RS-180, Spring 2017

Warm up for the conclusion of this course by taking a look at the rubric we use in Religious Studies to evaluate our program's effectiveness.

Next, arrive at an awareness of a need among the audience you have chosen that you can address through preaching (or, with our approval, some other response). Take the following steps:

Part I: Research

Articulate your understanding of that audience's need in theological language.

Prayerfully consider biblical texts that seem promising for meeting that need. You may want to develop a short list of 3-4 such texts, but that is not necessary. Keep observations for your own use on how your passage(s) seems to hold promise.

Through our course materials, materials from other courses, biblical and theological reference works, and other resources, refine your understanding of both the need you have sensed and the texts you have chosen. At this stage, things may change – perhaps your list of texts, or perhaps your sense of the need you are addressing.

Part II: Preaching

When your grasp of these things is adequate to begin developing your sermon, go ahead. Write at least an 'abstract' (what you intend to say) and an outline. A fully written text is also acceptable. You will give us a copy of this written material when you preach.

Preach it!

Part III: Reflection

You may revise your project and sermon after the fact, and you will submit a theological reflection on the process to hand in with it. Answer these questions:

First: How well do both John Webster's doctrine of scripture and Craig Keener's Spirit hermeneutic align with your understanding, expectations, and use of scripture in this preaching exercise and in scripture's broader role in your context? Be specific.

Second: Hermeneutical competence, sound 'theological judgment', and ecclesial engagement are three outcomes that the Religious Studies department has chosen for our major. In other words, these are qualities we want you to leave with and put to use. Describe specific ways your preaching project pertained to each role.

Remember, as always, we want to see proper style, clear writing, a thorough answer to the question, and explicit citations of course materials. Aim for a length of 4-6 double-spaced pages.

- B. Rubrics used to evaluate the data
(see next page)
- C. Relevant assessment-related documents
(see pages following)