

# Annual Assessment Report

Department: Religious Studies

Academic Year: 2017-2018

Date of Submission: 13 September 2018

Department Chair: Caryn Reeder

## I. Response to the previous year PRC's recommendations

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| <p>Item: Discussion of human sexuality and the Church</p>                                                                              | <p>Response: Following a contentious chapel in fall 2017, the campus discussion of the issue of homosexuality became a major concern. The department followed up on the campus-wide concern with a series of department meetings to discuss individual faculty's pedagogical strategies on human sexuality. We plan to continue our internal discussions this year. These departmental conversations also relate to our PLOs in a practical way (hermeneutical competence, theological judgment, and ecclesial engagement), providing an arena for analyzing and assessing our own pedagogical strategies in relation to this very practical and important concern.</p>                    |
| <p>Item: Supporting student learning in the RS GE classes</p> <p><i>See: RS 6 Year Report Action Plan, item 4; Key Questions 5</i></p> | <p>Response: An ongoing concern for several years in the RS department is the perceived lack of knowledge of students coming into the three RS GE classes (Intro to Old Testament, Intro to New Testament, and Christian Doctrine). The department discussed measures to support student learning in these courses, including the possibilities of a placement test or self-assessment quiz and a first-year seminar for students with little to no Bible knowledge. Helen Rhee is running a pilot seminar in fall 2018. The assessment for CUPA and the GE Common Contexts courses occurring in the 2018-19 academic year will also be helpful as we continue to develop our courses.</p> |
| <p>Item: Increasing our majors and minors</p> <p><i>See: RS 6 Year Report Action Plan, item 1; Key Questions 1, 3</i></p>              | <p>Response: Like many departments in the Humanities, RS has seen a shrinking body of majors over the past decade. We plan to implement several new activities this year to build up a sense of community within the major and attract students into the major. We are currently discussing the following: (1) RS Department gatherings once or twice a semester, with a presentation from an RS faculty member (food +</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

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|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <p>thought); (2) Hot Topics conversations, with small group discussion of major questions facing the Church, the discipline, or society; (3) Invite RS alumnae to share about their experience in the major, and life after graduation; (4) Dedicated recruitment events.</p> <p>As part of this process, we hope to continue to address a lingering concern: the perceived disconnect of RS classes from the Christian life. A revitalized program of departmental gatherings and opportunities for deliberate conversation will be a natural arena for helping students see the relevance of their courses for the life of faith.</p> |
| <p><b>Notes:</b><br/> We cannot locate any document with PRC recommendations from the 2017-18 academic year. We wonder if we lost it during some evacuation or mudslide. Instead of PRC recommendations, I have here incorporated the RS department's work to address the ways campus-wide conversations intersect with departmental goals and concerns.</p> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

**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.*

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| <b>Program Learning Outcome</b>         | <p><b>Ecclesial Engagement</b></p> <p>Our graduates will increasingly recognize connections between personal faith, scholarly inquiry, and the shared life of God's people in the world past and present. They will sense no conflict between rigorous intellectual inquiry, faithful service, and passionate worship. They will establish lifelong disciplines marked by theological reflection, Christ-like compassion, and robust engagement in the public square.</p> |
| <b>Who is in Charge /Involved?</b>      | <p><b>Sameer Yadav (as one of the professors who taught RS 180, the senior seminar) and Caryn Reeder (as department chair) / graduating seniors in RS 180 in spring 2018</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b><u>Direct Assessment Methods</u></b> | <p><b>Student case study papers from RS 180</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

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| <b>Indirect Assessment Methods</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Student self-assessment on RS Department Rubric, survey responses, and focus group interview (6 student participants)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Major Findings</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p>(1) Case study papers: 4 of 6 students display ‘highly developed’ ecclesial engagement: “Work displays evidence of mature Christian commitment (e.g., personal faith, Christian community, inquisitiveness, spiritual disciplines, compassion and other virtues, robust missional or public engagement, etc.)” 2 of 6 students display ‘developed’ ecclesial engagement: “Work displays evidence of and interest in sustained, maturing, informed Christian commitment.” The results from our assessment of student work indicates that students are exceeding our benchmarks (90% at ‘emerging’ and 50% at ‘developed’).</p> <p>(2) The positive development of ecclesial engagement in student work is not evident in student self-assessment or reflections on the major. Students scored themselves overall lower on ecclesial engagement than their work suggests (3 self-assessed at ‘highly developed’; 2 self-assessed at ‘developed’; 2 self-assessed at ‘emerging’). Responses on the survey support students’ understanding of a lack of preparation for ecclesial engagement; e.g., the RS department is weakest in “preparing us for real world jobs (ministry, teaching experience and training)”; “ecclesial engagement” (and a corresponding desire for more classes that would emphasize “Christian engagement” – expressed by three students). In the focus group, students expressed an interest in practicums and internships, in support of ecclesial engagement.</p> |
| <b>Closing the Loop Activities</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | The department will discuss these findings, and particularly the divide between our assessment of their work and their self-assessment, in department meetings in fall 2018. The department will continue to work with the Westmont Downtown program and other internship opportunities, and encourage our majors to explore such opportunities. We will also discuss ways to support our majors in understanding their own ecclesial engagement as broader than they may think. In this process, it may be useful to reconsider our description of ecclesial engagement and the language of assessment for ecclesial engagement (in the process, revisiting our conversation about ways to broaden ‘ecclesial engagement’ to include world religions).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <p><b>Collaboration and Communication</b><br/> Sameer Yadav read and commented on the case study papers and conducted the focus group conversation. He discussed his findings and the focus group report with Caryn Reeder (department chair in fall 2018).</p> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

or/and

**II B. Key Questions**

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| <b>Key Question</b>                       |  |
| <b>Who is in Charge/Involved?</b>         |  |
| <b><u>Direct Assessment Methods</u></b>   |  |
| <b><u>Indirect Assessment Methods</u></b> |  |
| <b>Major Findings</b>                     |  |
| <b>Recommendations</b>                    |  |
| <b>Collaboration and Communication</b>    |  |

**III. Follow-ups**

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| <b>Program Learning Outcome or Key Question</b> | <b>From the RS Action Plan for 6 year report (2017):</b> Strengthen Hebrew language instruction and the biblical languages minor, as well as opportunities for students in historical geography. |
| <b>Who was involved in implementation?</b>      | <b>Sandra Richter, in consultation with Telford Work</b>                                                                                                                                         |

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| What was decided or addressed?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Two proposals were developed for new Mayterm programs: HEB 001 (introductory Hebrew) and an off-campus program at Jerusalem University College.                                                                                    |
| How were the recommendations implemented?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 5 students (1 RS major and 4 non-majors) took HEB 001 in Mayterm 2018 (taught by an adjunct professor), and 4 students (no majors) attended Jerusalem University College's 3-week program, "Geographical and Historical Settings." |
| <p><b>Collaboration and Communication</b></p> <p>(1) Students who participated in the Hebrew Mayterm report a good learning experience, but mixed opinion on whether Hebrew is a good fit for a Mayterm class (two students thought it worked well because the intensive setting allowed for focused learning; two others thought the intensity was overwhelming, and a slower learning approach would be better). The professors who teach biblical languages in the RS department plan to meet Tuesday, 25 September, to further discuss the Hebrew Mayterm and the biblical languages program in general. We would like to increase overall enrollment, particularly in Hebrew, whether through a similar Mayterm class or in a full-semester class.</p> <p>(2) Students who participated in the JUC program felt it was a worthwhile introduction to the geography and history of the land. For one student, the program did not inspire her to further RS studies; for another, the program inspired her to take on an RS minor. We plan to work with the Off-Campus Programs Committee to address the feasibility of continuing to offer this program in Mayterm, and we will discuss ways to integrate it into the major as a department.</p> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

**IV. Other assessment or Key Questions related projects**

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| Project                     | Community space for Porter Center                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Who is in Charge /Involved? | Caryn Reeder and Telford Work                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Major Findings              | After years of discussion and requests to the administration, Porter Center is still without community space. We plan to seriously pursue two options in the coming year: 1. Bruce Fisk's office will be vacated at the end of the semester. While the building may have need of office space for adjunct faculty in the coming years, Bruce's departure leaves us with the opportunity to utilize his office as a common space with resource books, study space for students, and comfy chairs for hanging out. 2. Telford's Eagle Scouts need projects, and a project to develop the current wildlands of ferns between the |

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|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | two Porter Center entries into a level, graveled area is under consideration. The expense for materials and furniture could be divided between the departments in the building (with respect to the numbers of faculty each department represents).                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Action</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | We will continue to work on finding and incorporating a common space into Porter Center. It has been a long-standing need for all three departments in the building, and it would support a multiplicity of departmental goals. By encouraging faculty/student interactions and allowing for informal RS conversations, faculty will be able to inspire students to further study in RS, address the connection of RS classes with the life of faith, and more. |
| <b>Collaboration and Communication</b><br>Conversation with the Philosophy and Liberal Studies departments will be necessary, and we will need to seek permission from administrators if we move ahead with the redevelopment of the outdoor area. |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

**V. Adjustments to the Multi-year Assessment Plan (optional)**

| Proposed adjustment | Rationale | Timing |
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**VI. Appendices**

- A. The Senior Seminar Case Study prompt and annotated papers
- B. The RS Program Learning Outcome Rubric
- C. Student surveys and focus group notes