

Annual Assessment Report

Department: Religious Studies

Academic Year: 2018-2019

Date of Submission:

Department Chairs: Helen Rhee and Caryn Reeder

I. Response to the previous year PRC's recommendations

<p>Item: Increasing student sample size for assessment</p> <p><i>See: PRC recommendations for the 2017-2018 annual report</i></p>	<p>Response: In the 2017-2018 academic year, the RS department set up a Google Team Drive to collect departmental records, minutes, agendas, and student work for assessment. As part of this drive, we have begun to collect student work to expand our student sample size for assessment.</p>
<p>Item: Rebuilding the Religious Studies Department community</p> <p><i>This was a new endeavor in response to various departmental changes.</i></p>	<p>Response: The Religious Studies department has faced significant personnel changes over the past two years with the departure of Tremper Longman and Bruce Fisk, the arrival of Sandra Richter, and Holly Beers's move into a tenure track position. These personnel changes were accompanied by serious disruptions in the 2017-2018 academic year (Thomas Fire, Montecito Debris Flow, and the associated evacuations). Therefore, during the 2018-2019 academic year, the department worked to rebuild a sense of community within the department. This included events with current and former students (see part III below) and the development of the Google Team Drive. In addition, we devoted time during department meetings to allow each department member to share on their own teaching, research, and community involvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Holly Beers discussed her goals as a teacher, which include giving students larger frameworks for understanding the details, beauty, complexity, and challenge of the New Testament.● Charles Farhadian shared on his sabbatical.● Caryn Reeder discussed strategies for creating a hospitable learning environment for students and supporting struggling students.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Helen Rhee shared on the research she planned to carry out on her sabbatical in spring 2019 ● Sandra Richter inspired us to consider the significance of archaeology for reading and interpreting the Old Testament. ● Telford Work shared on his time volunteering with Lights On, a jail ministry, with students. ● Sameer Yadav addressed his research agenda for the John Templeton grant during his academic leave. ● Bill Nelson will share during the coming academic year, as unfortunately his presentation on the history of the RS department at Westmont was delayed by other concerns in spring 2019.
<p>Notes: The first item here came from the PRC recommendations in response to the RS department 2017-2018 Annual Report. The additional item reflects a significant strand of departmental work for the 2018-2019 academic year.</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.

Program Learning Outcome	<p>CUPA ILO Assessment and the GE Common Contexts courses (RS 001, 010, and 020)</p> <p>General Education student learning outcome: Students will demonstrate literacy in Christian scripture and Christian doctrine.</p> <p><i>See: RS 6 Year Report Action Plan, item 4; Key Questions 5</i></p>
Who is in Charge /Involved?	<p>(1) Caryn Reeder and Sandra Richter are both members of the CUPA Assessment Team, chaired by Lisa DeBoer. Lisa DeBoer met with the entire department at a special meeting on 13 August 2018 to review the CUPA assessment plans and solicit departmental feedback.</p> <p>(2) Holly Beers, Bill Nelson, Caryn Reeder, Sandra Richter, Telford Work, and Sameer Yadav were involved in developing questions related to RS 001, RS 010, and RS 020 for the assessment work.</p> <p>(3) Holly Beers, Bill Nelson, Caryn Reeder, Sandra Richter, and adjunct Kyle Wells administered assessment tests at the beginning and end of the semester in RS 001 and 010 in fall 2018 and spring 2019.</p> <p>(4) The entire department has been involved in conversations at department meetings throughout the year as detailed below.</p>

<p><u>Direct Assessment Methods</u></p>	<p>(1) Old Testament and New Testament assessment tests were administered at the beginning and end of the semester in fall 2018 and spring 2019 in all RS 001 and RS 010 courses.</p> <p>(2) The CUPA team also administered the assessment tests, along with questions related to RS 020, to graduating seniors in fall 2018.</p>
<p><u>Indirect Assessment Methods</u></p>	<p>The CUPA team administered the Taylor survey to graduating seniors. The RS department was not involved directly with this assessment.</p>
<p>Major Findings</p>	<p>We have not seen the full results of the CUPA assessment in 2018-2019. However, as a department we invested significant time and thought into the assessment and development of our GE courses in 2018-2019.</p> <p>(1) Helen Rhee taught a First Year Seminar to introduce the Bible in fall 2018. Unfortunately, few students participated in the seminar, and the seminar planned for spring 2019 was cancelled due to low enrollment. While we may revisit this concept in the future, the idea of using a seminar to introduce students to biblical stories and themes may not be the best way forward, particularly in light of the changing demographics of higher education.</p> <p>(2) RS GE professors participated in the new library tutorial program in fall and spring. Theresa Covich, who is in charge of the program, spoke at a department meeting to introduce the program, and she and the department chair, Caryn Reeder, also had several meetings throughout the year to discuss the program and possible adjustments.</p> <p>(3) The department chair, Caryn Reeder, attended a meeting of the GE committee in fall 2018 to discuss average grades and failure rates in the three RS GE courses over the past years. This information was disseminated to the department at a department meeting, including an overview of RS 001, 010, and 020; each professor's own class records (given only to individual professors); and comparisons of semester averages with HIS 010, PHI 006, CS 030, and POL 030. We discussed noticeable trends, potential explanations for blips (including the arrival of new professors; adjuncts; and natural disasters), and strategies for moving forward.</p> <p>(4) We spent several department meetings addressing teaching strategies and instructional goals in the RS GE classes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Holly Beers discussed her own strategies for engaging students' hearts and minds in RS 010 classes. ● Caryn Reeder discussed tactics for creating a hospitable classroom space for struggling students from the 2018 Cornell University Train the Trainer conference, as well as her own research. ● All GE professors responded to a prompt: 'What do we want from our students in twenty years?' We discussed our long-term learning goals, their correlation with GE learning outcomes, and the possible effect of changing demographic trends in higher education on these goals as a department. See Appendix A. <p>(5) We discussed the GE Senior Survey results from spring 2018 at a department meeting in fall 2018. See Appendix B.</p> <p>(6) Bill Nelson was awarded a Professional Development grant for summer 2019 to revise his RS 001 course.</p>

Closing the Loop Activities	<p>(1) As a department, we will continue our conversation in the 2019-2020 academic year. In particular, we look forward to working through the results of the CUPA assessment tests in order to understand student learning and develop our GE courses to meet student needs.</p> <p>(2) We will continue to work with Theresa Covich on evaluating and developing the library tutorial program. The program seemed more successful in fall in terms of student participation than in spring. We will review participation this year to see if that trend continues. We will continue to discuss ways to encourage student participation and evaluate the effectiveness of the program.</p> <p>(3) We will continue departmental conversations on effective strategies for supporting student learning in our GE courses.</p>
-----------------------------	--

Collaboration and Communication
The professors who teach the RS GE classes were significantly involved in developing the assessment tests, and administering them in RS 001 and 010. The entire department engaged in significant conversations around these topics throughout the academic year with the encouragement of the chair, Caryn Reeder.

Program Learning Outcome	<p>Theological Judgment</p> <p>Our graduates will understand the fundamental claims and logic of the Christian faith, appreciate the development of Christian theological traditions over time, and be able to think theologically.</p>
Who is in Charge /Involved?	Telford Work (as the professor who taught the senior seminar) and Sandra Richter (as departmental representative) / graduating seniors in spring 2019
Direct Assessment Methods	Student sermons from RS 125 in spring 2019
Indirect Assessment Methods	Student self-assessment on RS Department Rubric, survey responses, and focus group interview (3 student participants)
Major Findings	<p>(1) Sermons: 2 students show ‘highly developed’ theological judgment (A. Research practices and results display critical comprehension of the logic, parameters, and significance of orthodox, catholic Christian belief, using it as a fertilizer rather than as a weedkiller; B. Theological interests influence the direction and shape of the inquiry in a way that is <i>critical</i> (theology asks hard questions), <i>relevant</i> (theology makes a difference), and <i>illuminating</i> (theology leads to real insight)); 1 student shows somewhere between a developed and ‘developing’ theological judgment (A. Research practices and results recognize the existence of</p>

	<p>orthodox, catholic Christian belief, but more as a constrictively, heteronomously imposed straitjacket than an internal principle driving inquiry forward; B. Theological interests may be specified or implied, but tend either to be pasted <i>post hoc</i> onto the inquiry or simply to predetermine the conclusions reached, with minimal substantive interaction). While these results meet departmental benchmarks, the small sample size makes the average less reliable.</p> <p>(2) For this group of graduating seniors, their Religious Studies program was interrupted by faculty leave, Tremper Longman's retirement and the search for his replacement, the Thomas Fire, and the Montecito Debris Flow. All three graduates were also double majors. As such, they had a number of course substitutions between them, a circumstance which matters for both the departmental assessment of their work and the students' self-assessment. Students assess themselves as highly developed with respect to Ecclesial Engagement, especially in terms of mission and globalization (both from their on-campus coursework and abroad programs). They are less confident in terms of hermeneutical competence and theological judgment.</p>
Closing the Loop Activities	The department will discuss these findings, especially the focus group interview, in department meetings in fall 2019. The three graduates particularly highlighted a desire for more internship opportunities, so the department will continue to work with the Westmont Downtown program and other internship opportunities, and find ways to encourage our majors to explore such opportunities.
<p>Collaboration and Communication</p> <p>Telford Work read and commented on the sermons from RS 125. He and Sandra Richter worked together on assessing the student work, as well as on conducting and analyzing the focus group interview.</p>	

or/and

II B. Key Questions

Key Question	
Who is in Charge/Involved?	
Direct Assessment Methods	

Indirect Assessment Methods	
Major Findings	
Recommendations	
Collaboration and Communication	

III. Follow-ups

Program Learning Outcome or Key Question	<p>Supporting our majors and minors</p> <p>RS 6 Year Report Action Plan (2017), item 1: Help students “connect head and heart,” nurturing Christian faith as a full life experience in the Holy Spirit rather than merely intellectual or emotional. Initiatives include faith conversations in classrooms, internships, and/or focused department events and chapels.</p> <p>Key question 1: How do we build a robust major that attracts more students?</p> <p>Key question 3: How do we balance academic rigor with the development of Christian affections, spirituality, and practice?</p>
Who was involved in implementation?	All department members engaged in this work. Holly Beers, Caryn Reeder, and Sandra Richter organized events.
What was decided or addressed?	In our 2017-2018 Annual Report, we noted our departmental conversations concerning our shrinking body of majors over the past decade. During the 2018-2019 academic year, we held several successful events for our majors, minors, and graduates to encourage a sense of community in the department, as well as address the perceived disconnect of RS classes from the Christian life.
How were the recommendations implemented?	<p>(1) 23 October 2018: We held a dinner for majors, minors, and interested students. Three professors shared reflections on the connection of their academic work with their own faith. All attendees engaged in a thoughtful dialog around these issues.</p> <p>(2) Department chapel in 2018: The department chapel, held together with the Philosophy Department, included brief messages from three professors on spiritual disciplines (scripture, prayer, and Sabbath).</p>

	<p>(3) 17 November 2018: We hosted a gathering at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting in Denver. Four current professors, two former professors, and seven Westmont graduates attended.</p> <p>(4) 20 March 2019: We held a dinner for majors, minors, and interested students. Students submitted questions for professors to address (see Appendix C). The conversation was broad, with participation from all professors in attendance.</p> <p>(5) 2 April 2019: Sandra Richter hosted a gathering for the RS seniors at her home to celebrate their upcoming graduation.</p>
--	--

Collaboration and Communication
All department members engaged in this work, discussing possibilities at department meetings and attending and participating in events. Caryn Reeder, Holly Beers, and Sandra Richter organized events. Student participation was high at the various gatherings. Students enjoyed and benefited from faculty testimonies, and we look forward to continuing such events in the future.

Program Learning Outcome or Key Question	<p>Biblical Languages: Hebrew and Greek RS 6 Year Report Action Plan (2017), item 2: Strengthen Hebrew language instruction and the biblical languages minor Also see RS Annual Report 2017-2018</p>
Who was involved in implementation?	<p>The professors who teach biblical language classes: Holly Beers, Bill Nelson, Caryn Reeder, and Sandra Richter</p>
What was decided or addressed?	<p>(1) Following on our initial work in 2017-2018, we continued to evaluate the effectiveness of our current offerings, including the Hebrew Mayterm in 2018. The biblical languages professors met in September 2018 to discuss the biblical languages program history and historical enrollment data, and propose steps as we move forward (see Appendix C).</p> <p>(2) Sandra Richter developed a new Hebrew course, HB 101. We had hoped to have enough student interest to offer this course in fall 2019, but after many conversations and surveys of student interest, we decided to run HEB 001/002 in 2019-2020 in order to grow the potential student group for HB 101 in fall 2020.</p>
How were the recommendations implemented?	<p>(1) 27 September 2018: The four professors who teach biblical languages met to discuss the classes and minor.</p> <p>(2) October 2018: The Registrar provided historical enrollment data for the RS biblical languages classes, which was distributed to biblical language professors.</p> <p>(3) January 2019: Sandra Richter developed and submitted a new course proposal for HB 101. The course was approved and added to the RS catalog.</p> <p>(4) March 2019: Caryn Reeder worked with Michelle Hardley to add HB 101 to the Biblical Languages minor.</p>

(5) March 2019: Bill Nelson, Caryn Reeder, and Sandra Richter met to work out a plan for the Hebrew offerings in 2019-2020.

Collaboration and Communication

Holly Beers, Bill Nelson, Caryn Reeder, and Sandra Richter were all involved in conversations, planning, and course development in 2018-2019. The meeting in September 2018 was reported to the full department, and a record of the notes was made available in the RS Google Drive. The full department also looked at Sandra Richter’s HB 101 course proposal.

IV. Other assessment or Key Questions related projects

Project	Community space for Porter Center
Who is in Charge /Involved?	Caryn Reeder and Telford Work
Major Findings	<p>A community space for Porter Center 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.</p> <p>After years of discussion and requests to the administration, Porter Center is still without community space. We seriously pursued the option of a project to develop the current wildlands of ferns between the two Porter Center entries into a level, graveled area with patio furniture. Unfortunately, this idea, presented as an Eagle Scout project by Ben Work, was deemed unworkable as it would require extensive fencing.</p> <p>So, in the interests of finding some corner of space for gatherings and student engagement, we will turn our attention this year to refurbishing an empty office in Porter Center as a small common room. While the building may have need of office space for adjunct faculty in the coming years, when there is no adjunct the office can be used as a common space with resource books, study space for students, and comfy chairs for hanging out. We will also continue to work towards an outdoor meeting area on a smaller scale than envisioned in the project we proposed.</p>
Action	We will work together to refurbish the empty office as a community gathering space. We will continue to petition the college for a larger outdoor meeting space.
Collaboration and Communication	
Conversation with the Philosophy and Liberal Studies departments will be necessary.	

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

Proposed adjustment	Rationale	Timing

VI. Appendices

- A. RS GE Review Document 1: What do we want from our students in twenty years?
- B. RS GE Review Document 2: Senior Survey 2018
- C. RS student questions
- D. Biblical languages discussion

A draft of this annual report was prepared by Caryn Reeder in consultation with Helen Rhee. The draft was circulated to the entire department, which were discussed and commented on it in a department meeting on 3 September 2019. Department members' comments and suggestions were incorporated into the final version.