

**The 2018-2019 CUPA Assessment and the General Education Program: Common
Contexts
Report to the General Education Committee
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Institutional Learning Outcome: Westmont graduates will demonstrate literacy in biblical and orthodox Christian faith.

Religious Studies GE Learning Outcomes: Students will *demonstrate literacy in Christian scripture and Christian doctrine*" (Westmont College General Education Learning Outcomes).

To meet this broad learning outcome, students will:

- Demonstrate literacy in the content of the Old and New Testaments (i.e., books, genres, literary structures, themes, stories, chronology, major characters, histories, and theologies);
- Apply appropriate interpretive approaches to Scripture and other sources to recover original meaning and subsequent significance of the texts (for Church, kingdom, and wider world), taking into account historical backgrounds and critical issues.

Results of CUPA/GE Assessment of Introduction to Old Testament (RS-001), New Testament (RS-010), and Christian Doctrine (RS-020)

Biblical Studies faculty in the Religious Studies department, in collaboration with the Liaison from the General Education Committee (Mullen), created a biblical literacy survey that was administered in each RS-001 (Sandy Richter, Bill Nelson) and RS-010 section (Holly Beers, Caryn Reeder) in Fall 2018. The assessment questions were written collaboratively by the relevant faculty. The surveys were inserted into Canvas and administered as pre- and post-tests.

During the spring 2019 semester, the biblical literacy survey - with added doctrine questions provided by Sameer Yadav and Telford Work - was given to outgoing seniors.

The following are excerpts from the **Religious Studies Department Annual Report 2019-2020, Appendix B: CUPA Assessment Discussions**. Note that the assessment results were discussed in RS department meetings department on September 17, 2019 and January 14, 2020.

- **Value and limitations of the CUPA assessment survey: Common Contexts**
 - The survey has value in **tracking student retention of factual information from the three RS GE classes**.
 - Comparing the results from students who were at the time enrolled in RS 001 and 010 with results from graduating seniors has some advantages towards **developing longitudinal data on GE curriculum**.
 - The RS department also notes that **tracking the same students through their academic careers could lead to a more specific data set on student performance**.
 - Faculty employed **factual questions** to assess the GE learning outcome of biblical and theological literacy, **along with questions that were more interpretive or**

- RS GE professors use a variety of methods to help students develop and practice these skills.
 - First, professors model good interpretive methods by class lectures and discussions.
 - Second, in-class discussions and small group work allows students to practice these skills with each other (particularly in RS 010 and 020).
 - Mullen Note: Richter practices this in RS 001.
- Assessments of student abilities include essays, creative writing assignments, short written responses, and written exam questions; GE professors are overall satisfied with the evidence of student development of interpretive skills in GE courses.

Closing the Loop

The results of these assessments and RS faculty discussion and interpretation of them were shared in both their own Annual Report (see above) and the GE Committee's Annual Report.

In the Annual Report, the department said they were "interested in pursuing the development of assessment tools to add to the evidence of the CUPA Senior Survey with evidence of student ability to interpret texts and traditions." This was particularly important in the Old Testament and New Testament courses, where an emphasis on factual knowledge can sometimes overshadow biblical interpretation. Faculty in these courses continue to face the challenge of teaching all Westmont students, who come with a broad range of prior biblical knowledge.

The GE Committee conducted a syllabus audit of these courses last year. Bill Nelson was contacted and asked to update his syllabus for RS-001 to better reflect the GE Common Context learning outcomes. There were also concerns expressed about how he might better adapt his pedagogy to reflect the CUPA findings. His Fall 2020 syllabus is now available in the class syllabi archive.