

Annual Assessment Report

Department: Religious Studies

Academic Year: 2021-2022

Date of Submission:

Department Chair: Helen Rhee

I. Response to the previous year PRC's recommendations

Item: Collection of data	Response: The department continues to collect assessment data for our graduating seniors through the Senior Seminar class. This data includes student work as well as focus group interviews. We maintain a shared Google drive for preserving assessment materials from Senior Seminar, as well as data on historical grade trends in the three RS GE classes (RS 001, 010, and 020). During the 2020-2021 academic year, the RS department conducted two major surveys (the Faith Development survey and the Ethnicity and Race survey). Administering, analyzing, and discussing these surveys took significant effort. Because the departmental search in fall 2021 took precedence over other departmental activities, normal departmental business was delayed until spring 2022. Given other needs, we were ultimately unable to revisit the surveys in the 2021-2022 academic year. During department meetings early in fall 2022, we will discuss implementing the surveys for the 2022-2023 academic year so that we can incorporate the results into our six year report as we plan for the future of the department.
Item: Student learning and success with respect to professors' initiatives and interventions	Response: As a department we recognize that student learning has been disrupted by the global pandemic. In addition, students (particularly as they finished high school) became accustomed to generous policies regarding attendance, assignment submission, and grading. We discussed concerns related to student performance, especially in RS 001, 010, and 020, in several spring department meetings. Professors continue to adapt lectures, discussions, and assignments in response to student needs (see fuller details below in section III). We will return to a full departmental discussion and analysis of different interventions we have implemented in fall 2022, with attention to student evaluation of the interventions and the evidence of in-class assessment and final grades (for recent semesters and in historical perspective).
Item: Departmental collaboration	Response: As a department, during the 2021-2022 academic year we:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ran a search , which included discussions of departmental needs, evaluation and virtual interviews of candidates, and hosting three candidates on campus for interviews and lectures. Although the search was successful, the candidate ultimately took a position at another institution, and we anticipate a new search in fall 2022; • Developed departmental expectations and guidelines for inviting external lecturers to campus, including establishing a three-year schedule and planning for budgeting (see section III below for more information); • Collaborated with Rick Ostrander on plans for a Certificate in Theological Leadership, a postgraduate program to be offered at Westmont Downtown, and staffed by several RS professors; • Discussed how to grow the number of RS majors and minors including marketing the major to potential students, hosting an open house session, inviting alums, and collaborating with the career center (COVE); • Discussed the appropriate major (and minor) size and resolved to take a department-wide survey (including alums) on this with our priorities, goals, and a general layout of the major in mind.
Notes:	

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>Theological Judgment</p> <p><i>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. They will faithfully interpret texts including the Bible and other primary sources in the worldwide Christian tradition. They will fairly evaluate the theological claims of secondary sources and current voices within and outside the Christian tradition. They will thoughtfully address intellectual and practical issues involving both narrowly theological matters and concerns in other disciplines. They will be acquainted with, and increasingly formed in, the practices that Christian theology serves including worship, fellowship, mission, study (especially of the Bible), and ethical conduct.</i></p>
Who is in Charge /Involved?	Telford Work (as the professor who taught the senior seminar alternative course for 2021-2022)

<u>Direct Assessment Methods</u>	<p>Student work from RS-125 (substituting for RS-180)</p> <p><i>These assignments and analyses are in Appendix A.</i></p>
<u>Indirect Assessment Methods</u>	<p>Student survey responses</p> <p><i>The survey results are included in Appendix B.</i></p>
Major Findings	<p>Assessment of student work:</p> <p>Theological judgment: “reason according to the logic of the Christian faith”</p> <p>The standards are:</p> <p>4 (highly developed): Reasoning displays critical comprehension and reliance upon the logic, parameters, and significance of orthodox, catholic Christian belief, with unusual insight.</p> <p>3 (developed): Reasoning displays critical comprehension of, direction from, and adherence to orthodox, catholic Christian belief.</p> <p>2 (emerging): Reasoning displays somewhat accurate awareness of orthodox, catholic Christian belief.</p> <p>1 (initial): Reasoning shows little interest in interacting with orthodox, catholic Christian belief, or such interaction is incoherent, disconnected, superfluous, or lacks insight.</p> <p>0 (insufficient): Reasoning displays ignorance of or unreflective, uninformed opposition to orthodox, catholic Christian belief or treats it as irrelevant.</p> <p>All five graduating majors received 4s. The topic asked about nuanced contrasts and comparisons among three theological voices about a wider variety of theological voices, especially in the global south, and students picked up on those nuances well while displaying comprehension of as well as reliance upon theological norms.</p> <p>For comparison Telford Work also evaluated the other five students. These received two 4s, three 3s, and a 2. The RS majors among these students earned one of the 4s and two of the 3s.</p> <p>Analysis of student survey responses:</p> <p>In Telford Work’s focus group, seniors self-assessed in around the 3.5 range, so they have a more humble appraisal of their own skills. They gave the department high marks for preparing them well. A wide variety of courses were cited as especially helpful, spanning biblical languages, biblical studies, theology, history, missiology, internship, and religion. Students appreciated the way independent research (especially exegetical in nature) and theological diversity strengthened them; they were less appreciative of the time spent listening to students' in-class presentations. Students thought the volume of writing in Helen Rhee's history courses would seem to meet “writing inside the major” requirements (though not necessarily certification criteria).</p>

Closing the Loop Activities	These activities are based on the students' suggestions for improvement: Offer a course in heterodox Christianity and false Christianities, since they are so influential (drawing in graduated RS majors, for instance). Focus more on reconstruction and formation, to counter the college's tendency mainly to deconstruct. (Though some of this deconstruction is appropriate and helpful; some of our majors did not realize how unorthodox their churches had been.) Encourage internships, church participation as a 'zero unit lab,' regular Bible study, and interdisciplinary courses. They are willing to shrink the major's elective unit count to accommodate new requirements such as an internship. Students also contended that those who had been actively mentored did better. Finally, Charlie Farhadian's classes are well regarded but not well enough known; the department should raise awareness of them.
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Collaboration and Communication

or/and

II B. Key Questions

Key Question	
Who is in Charge/Involved?	
<u>Direct Assessment Methods</u>	
<u>Indirect Assessment Methods</u>	
Major Findings	
Recommendations	

Collaboration and Communication

III. Follow-ups

Program Learning Outcome or Key Question	Planning for RS Lectures and Events <i>6 year report action plan item 1: Nurture students' faith as a full life experience</i> <i>6 year report key questions 1: Build a robust major</i>
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Who was involved in implementation?	All department members engaged in significant conversations to develop and implement a plan for yearly RS lectures with external speakers, under the leadership of department chair Helen Rhee.
What was decided or addressed?	As a department, we invite scholars from other institutions to lecture to our students concerning their research on a somewhat irregular basis. However, we had never developed guidelines for planning, managing, and funding lectures. We worked through a variety of questions in department meetings in spring 2022 to develop a plan for a three-year cycle of lectures with expectations for funding. Establishing this plan will help us engage our majors and minors in developing their own faith as well as building a robust major as we invite scholars to introduce their work.
How were the recommendations implemented?	The plan will be put into place over the next years. We plan to cycle between an Erasmus lecture, a lecture funded by Charlie Farhadian's missions funding, and a lecture funded by the department itself.
Collaboration and Communication	
All department members engaged in this work at department meetings under Helen Rhee's leadership.	

Program Learning Outcome or Key Question	Professors' Pedagogical Initiatives Over the past three years, the department has addressed several overarching concerns, including support for the development of students' faith; the integration of racial and cultural diversity, and more specifically guidance in addressing race and racism in Christian perspective; and the development of strategies for helping students survive and thrive in the RS GE courses. Professors have developed a variety of tools, assignments, and course readings to meet these concerns in individual classes. This section provides an update on particular professors' initiatives.
Who was involved in implementation?	All department members have participated in departmental discussions and pedagogical initiatives.
What was decided or addressed?	We will continue to share our initiatives and the results apparent in our classes (evidenced by student reflections, assessment, and course evaluations), to further adapt our courses to meet student needs.
How were the recommendations implemented?	The following notes address particular professors' initiatives: Holly Beers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continues to give a "hermeneutical perspectives" assignment in RS 010 (supporting students' faith development and ability to appreciate diverse perspectives) • Chose readings reflecting a diverse range of authors in upper division classes, supported by thorough discussions of potential strengths and weaknesses in the various perspectives, with positive feedback from students (supporting students' desire to engage with non-White intellectual and spiritual traditions) • Created writing prompts in upper division classes to provide students with space for considering the practical implications of their studies for a life of faith (supporting students' faith development) Caryn Reeder

- Incorporated a new assignment to introduce students to particular diverse hermeneutical perspectives in RS 010 (supporting students' desire to engage with non-White intellectual and spiritual traditions)
- Incorporated essays and a final class discussion in RS 010 to allow students to explore the practical implications of course material for a life of faith (supporting students' faith development)
- Continues to adapt course structures, assignments, and policies to make RS 010 accessible for all students, especially first generation and minoritized students; the results of in-class assessments in spring 2022 suggests these interventions have successfully flattened the inverted bell curve of grades (supporting student learning in the RS GE classes)

Sandy Richter

- Addressed the tension of God's justice and mercy in lectures, assignments, and discussions in an upper division class on Isaiah, with positive results – students engaged the material in their own presentations and research (responding to point 7 of the results of the Faith Development Survey in 2020-2021, that students have difficulty understanding how divine punishment and justice can be held together)
- Introduced Mayterm students to diverse cultures and religions in Israel and Palestine in RS 155; students learned about local religions as well as political and cultural divides, engaging these topics intellectually, emotionally, and empathetically (supporting students' desire to engage with non-White intellectual and spiritual traditions)

Telford Work

- Incorporated books from Black Church perspectives (James and Rosamond Johnson, *The Books of American Negro Spirituals*; Voddie Baucham, Jr., *Fault Lines*; Esau McCaulley, *Reading While Black*), global south perspectives (The Voice of the Martyrs, *Hearts of Fire: Eight Women in the Underground Church*; Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*), and otherwise addressing issues of ethnicity and justice (Thaddeus Williams, *Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth*) with a variety of viewpoints (supporting students' desire to engage with non-White intellectual and spiritual traditions)
- Structure regular theological and biblical analysis of issues involving race, ethnicity, justice, ideologies, etc. into class discussions; revisit and reformulate for improvement and as social contexts shift (supporting students' faith development)

Sameer Yadav

- Incorporated Vince Bantu, *A Multitude of All Peoples*, as a course textbook to address the diverse range of theological perspectives in the early church in RS 020 (supporting students' desire to engage with non-White intellectual and spiritual traditions)
- Added an assignment to help students navigate the ways this textbook adds to or complicates a more traditional western-focused analysis of the church's theological development (supporting students' desire to engage with non-White intellectual and spiritual traditions)

Helen Rhee

- Invited Vince Bantu to Early and Medieval Christianity course to lecture on racial and ethnic dynamics in Antiquity and early Christianity (supporting students' desire to engage with non-White intellectual and spiritual traditions). Students responded positively
- Continues to introduce students to not only global Christianity and African-American church history but also American church's responses to racism in Reformation and Modern Christianity (supporting students' desire to engage with non-White intellectual and spiritual traditions)
- Continues to assign a faith and learning paper in all classes so that students can think through their faith through the course materials and engage the latter in their faith journeys (supporting students' faith development)
- Teaches an Augustinian Seminar, "Challenges to Faith," which deals with the topics considered challenging to Christian faith such as doubt, suffering, and mental health challenges, and helps students engage them from Christian perspectives (supporting students' faith development)

Charles Farhadian

- Started the organization, Santa Barbara Sending, of which Westmont's Campus Pastor's office is member, to host an annual mission conference at Westmont that features Christians from all over the world who demonstrate Christian reconciliation through the work and teaching (includes medical doctors, nurses, Bible translators, business persons, educators, and more). This multi-day event serves Westmont and the Santa Barbara community. Students in the course, Christian Mission, are required to attend the event. Classroom discussion includes how these students may have been inspired, challenged, and called to gear their talents and major areas of study toward participation in God's worldwide mission (supporting students' faith development)
- Continues to include and add to current books and articles written by people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, in part to illustrate global similarities and differences in a wide range of subjects (supporting students' desire to engage with non-White intellectual and spiritual traditions)
- Courses in Christian Mission and World Religions feature almost entirely non-Western perspectives (supporting students' desire to engage with non-White intellectual and spiritual traditions)
- Teaches a new course in the Nursing Program, Nursing & the Liberal Arts: Thinking Globally, where non-Western views and practices of healing and the use of biomedicine are highlighted. Film selections from Africa and Asia illustrate non-Western (Christian and non-Christian) participation in healing that demonstrate a non-mechanistic view of the person, medicine, and healing (supporting students' desire to engage with non-White intellectual and spiritual traditions)
- Teaches an Augustinian course, "Global, Local Church," where several church leaders from around the world visit the course either in person or via Zoom to educate students on issues at the intersection of ethnicity, cultures, and Christianity (from Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the Pacific) (supporting students' desire to engage with non-White intellectual and spiritual traditions)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will offer a Mayterm to India in 2023, where students will both serve the “poorest of the poor” (Kolkata, Chennai), and also understand Hindu traditions and the lives and impacts of those who worked toward a wide range of social injustices (supporting students’ desire to engage with non-White intellectual and spiritual traditions; supporting students’ faith development).
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Collaboration and Communication
 Professors’ initiatives concern their individual classes. However, we all discuss strategies, assignments, readings, and the results of the initiatives at department meetings.

Program Learning Outcome or Key Question	Porter Center Common Room A community space for Porter Center had been a long-standing need for all three departments in the building in support of 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. As reported in our 2020-2021 annual report, we finally created a common room in an empty office in Porter Center, furnished with a couch, chairs, and tables.
Who was involved in implementation?	The process of creating this common space took years of discussion, requests, and collaboration with the Philosophy and Education departments in Porter Center and Randy Jones.
What was decided or addressed?	The room was open for use this academic year.
How were the recommendations implemented?	The common room was used for Education Department meetings in 2021-2022, as well as a Greek tutorial in spring 2022. So far, it is underutilized as a space for students to study, relax, or engage with professors (perhaps unsurprising given the changes in community engagement during the pandemic). During the 2022-2023 academic year, the department will address how best to advertise the space and invite students in so that it becomes a community resource.

Collaboration and Communication
 All department members have been involved in developing the common room.

IV. Other assessment or Key Questions related projects

Project	
Who is in Charge /Involved?	
Major Findings	
Action	

Collaboration and Communication

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

Proposed adjustment	Rationale	Timing

VI. Appendices

Appendix A: Student Works

Appendix B: Senior Survey

A draft of this annual report was prepared by Caryn Reeder and Helen Rhee, incorporating contributions from department members. The draft was circulated to the entire department, which were discussed and commented on it in a department meeting in September 2022. Department members' comments and suggestions were incorporated into the final version.