

Annual Assessment Report Template

This form is intended to facilitate reporting program outcomes assessment to accrediting agencies, Board of Trustees, Strategic Planning Committee, and other internal or external audiences.

The department mission statement, PLO's, curricular map and multi-year assessment plan should to be posted on the departmental website.

Department: Religious Studies

Date: September 15, 2014

Department Chair: Telford Work

I. Program Learning Outcome (PLO) assessment

Program Learning Outcome	Theological Judgment
Who is in Charge	Telford Work
<u>Direct Assessment Methods</u>	Analysis of written assignments in RS-180, Senior Seminar, according to the PLO Assessment Rubric for Theological Judgment.
<u>Indirect Assessment Methods</u>	Self-evaluations of students in RS-180, Senior Seminar, at the conclusion of class, and focus group discussion.
Major Findings	<p>Evaluations of student work fell between '3-Good' and '4-Excellent', averaging 3.4.</p> <p>Student self-evaluations all fell between 'Good' and 'Excellent', averaging 3.5.</p> <p>Courses students said they found most helpful in accomplishing these were missiology (10 responses), upper-div NTs (8), history of world Christianity (5), world religions (5), senior seminar (4) and theology (4).</p> <p>Courses students most commonly identified as needing strengthening were theology (5) and upper-div OTs (3).</p> <p>As in prior years, students voiced some uneasiness with their capacity to come to theological conclusions and clarity.</p> <p>PRC asked the department to determine whether there are "components <i>within</i> [PLOs] that are stronger or weaker than others?" Focusing on the discrete terms and criteria of the assessment rubric in 2013-14 showed a consistent distribution of student performance, so that it does not seem that some components are stronger or weaker than others.</p> <p>PRC asked the department to determine whether "specific strengths are being identified" and "individual professors being commended." When asked in our Senior Seminar exit focus group which courses were most helpful for PLOs,</p>

	students' responses vary widely. There is not a readily identifiable pattern across our rather diverse majors.
Closing the Loop Activities	To deepen students' knowledge base for making sound theological judgments and coming to creative insights and fruitful applications, the department proposed a change in the major core to require a one-year survey of history of Christianity rather than just a semester and mandate a systematic theological focus in Senior Seminar. This change should give students a firmer basis for their theological and biblical reasoning.
Discussion	
Student self-evaluations were surprisingly consistent with their written work. Our department is gratified that there is not a disconnect between their self-appraisals and our appraisals of their student work. Both students and faculty can sometimes focus unduly on negatives and become too pessimistic.	
Our department discussed the quality and level of insight, good judgment, and especially the knowledge base required for them. We expect that more exposure to how differences of opinion and debates play out historically will train students in how to follow through the faithful and critical thinking process to something beyond mere knowledge of different positions.	

II. Follow-ups

Program Learning Outcome	Hermeneutical Competence, Ecclesial Engagement
Who is in Charge	Maurice Lee, Telford Work
Major Findings	The 2013 CUPA survey of seniors discussed Christian practices; church involvements figured prominently in students' answers of the activities that most clearly demonstrated Christian commitment.
Closing the Loop Activities	Our 2013 report noted student preaching on biblical texts in classes to improve and link these two outcomes. The practice continued in 2013-14 with student preaching in RS-126 in fall 2013 and RS-180 in spring 2014.
Discussion	
Program Learning Outcome	GE ILOs
Who is in Charge	Telford Work, Maurice Lee
Major	Department supported the Academic Senate's recommendation that RS-020 (Doctrine) be taken after biblical studies GE

Findings	courses.
Closing the Loop Activities	Academic Senate approved the recommendation in fall 2013, to take effect in academic advising for 2015-16.
Discussion	

III. Other assessment or key questions-related projects (optional)

Project	GE Critical Thinking ILO assessment in RS-180 Senior Seminar								
Who is in Charge	Helen Rhee, Telford Work								
Major Findings	<p>Senior RS majors scored below average in critical thinking in several areas:</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>evaluating and interpreting info</td> <td>59% (RS) v. 57% (non-RS)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>problem solving</td> <td>41% (RS) v. 49% (non-RS)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>creative thinking</td> <td>39% (RS) v. 50% (non-RS)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>effective communication</td> <td>43% (RS) v. 49% (non-RS)</td> </tr> </table> <p>Supporting these results, several focus group students voiced the desire for help in learning how to handle contested and difficult issues. This seems to relate to critical thinking.</p>	evaluating and interpreting info	59% (RS) v. 57% (non-RS)	problem solving	41% (RS) v. 49% (non-RS)	creative thinking	39% (RS) v. 50% (non-RS)	effective communication	43% (RS) v. 49% (non-RS)
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Action	Graduating seniors in RS-180 participated in the ILO assessment for critical thinking by taking the CAT for critical thinking.								

Discussion
 The department discussed the possible significance of these results and student self-evaluations. While the problems on a generalized test do not reflect the priorities of religious studies as closely as some other majors, the lower scores nevertheless deserve our attention. Our hypothesis is that students need more 'content' – historical, biblical, theological – in order to have an adequate basis for practicing and improving critical thinking in our classes. We hope the higher proportion of history of Christianity in the core furnishes students with more knowledge of the Christian tradition, and more opportunities to analyze positions, movements, and impacts in the past to gain a sense of how to move from exposure to evaluation and actions.

Project	Assessment calendar
Who is in Charge	Telford Work
Major Findings	PRC asked the department to consider establishing a clearer assessment calendar.
Action	The department requests a later submission date for annual reports than September 15.

Discussion
 Data are gathered from graduating seniors at the end of their spring semester to capture the most effects of their educations and to

capitalize on their more reflective stances as graduation looms in only a few days. Several faculty disperse for international destinations almost immediately, while others teach Mayterm classes. We only regather when school begins at the end of August. The September 15 deadline for annual reports forces us to compress our discussions. Either we continue squeezing the assessment and reporting process into some of the busiest planning weeks of the year, we push our data gathering earlier in the semester and miss the effects of (and our assessment process' contributions to) the formative last weeks of seniors' experiences, or we should move the annual report deadline to give us more breathing room.

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

Proposed adjustment	Rationale	Timing
Focus on one PLO each year.	PRC has requested for five years running that RS focus on one PLO rather than all three. The annual report template is structured for one outcome. The department agreed to PRC's proposal.	The department restricted its direct assessment to the Theological Judgment outcome in 2013-14, though it surveyed students on all three outcomes and discussed them together in our Senior Seminar exit focus group.

V. Appendices

- A. Prompts or instruments used to collect the data
- B. Rubrics used to evaluate the data
- C. Relevant assessment-related documents/samples (optional)

- A. Prompt for Senior Seminar assignment: Students were given a choice as follows:

A question we've heard now and again when discussing Yong and Stackhouse is, "What does this have to do with missional theology?"

If you are still asking that question, you might scan the tables of contents of Newbigin, Wright, and Keller to see where disability and gender issues might inhabit their missional frameworks. However, here is a scenario to pose the question more concretely and set up your assignment:

At its annual strategic planning meeting, your church decides how to prioritize goals for the coming year. Strategic planning is always a delicate matter for your church, because it threatens to expose and even deepen fault lines that lie within the congregation, let alone the surrounding community.

One early planning meeting is devoted to canvassing the congregation to gather opinions. Some congregational voices advocate for a more robust youth program. Others emphasize poverty relief, new buildings, music, pro-life advocacy, mission, debt reduction, recovery groups, and yes, greater attention to issues involving disability and gender relationships. All good things.

As the meeting closes, one of your elders suggests that a 'focus on mission' seems to be emerging as a priority. While this news strikes you as a legitimate interpretation of the people's remarks, there is some audible frustration from people who were articulating other priorities. After the meeting, you overhear just how deep that frustration is. It seems to take two main forms: First, dissatisfaction with 'mission' as a priority when the church has such pressing other needs, and second, impatience with other people's competing priorities. For instance, the debt-reduction folks and the new-buildings folks don't see eye to eye, and the 'mission' folks don't see either of those as sufficiently relevant to God's purpose for the church. Business as usual, in other words.

Since we have been focusing on disability and gender relationships, we would like you to focus on those. (The skills you develop in doing so will transfer to the others, so even if these are not high priorities to you personally, consider the potential for broader application.)

Option 1. Write to your church's strategic planning committee, on the relevance of either disability or gender issues (or both, if you prefer) to mission, particularly in your local (but not narrowly parochial) context.

or

*Option 2. At home that night, you notice a non-Christian, but theologically astute, 'Facebook friend' who links to a story about a local church controversy involving either disability or gender, expressing disapproval and remarking that this is why people don't take Christianity seriously. (We are leaving the particulars vague, as **you** need to supply the likely details. If you think you can realistically include both sets of issues and want to respond to both, you may.) The coincidence strikes you as ironic, until you remember that that's not what "ironic" really means. Anyway, write a response to that person. (Private, or public? That's up to you, O social media generation.)*

Whichever response you write, go ahead and refer to course materials explicitly. Your audience can take it. We think you will need need to draw on Newbigin, Wright, and/or Keller in addition to Yong or Stackhouse to answer well.

B. Rubric for evaluation ILOs is online at http://www.westmont.edu/academics/departments/religious_studies/RSMajorAssessmentRubric.html and is unchanged from prior year.

C. Relevant samples attached:

	4-Superior	3-Good	2-Satisfactory	average
evaluations of student work: Theological Judgment	5	7	0	3.4

discrete data:

3.3 3.5 3.0 3.3 3.0 3.4 3.5 3.7 3.2 4.0 3.2 3.5

Students' Self-Evaluations by Rubric:

Criterion	4-Superior	3-Good	2-Satisfactory	average
Hermeneutical Competence	8	5	1	3.5
Theological Judgment	7	7	0	3.5
Ecclesial Engagement	9	5	0	3.6

discrete data:

3 4 2 3 3 4 4 3 3 3.5 4 4 4 4
 4 4 3 3 3 3 4 3 3 4 4 4 3 4
 4 4 3 4 4 2.5 3 3 4 4 3 4 4 4

Appendices:

- 2014 Senior Seminar Self-Evaluations: according to Rubric
- 2014 Senior Seminar Self-Evaluations: short answers
- Actual Student Work evaluation sample
- Actual Student Work evaluations: according to rubric
- Senior Seminar May 2014 focus group notes
- Critical Thinking March 2014 test results for Religious Studies majors, extracted from CAT Overview
- Notes from February 2014 faculty-student conversation on "how do I return home?"