

Annual Assessment Report

Department: Religious Studies

Academic Year: 2019-2020

Date of Submission:

Department Chairs: Helen Rhee and Caryn Reeder

I. Response to the previous year PRC's recommendations

Item: Collection of student work	Response: As addressed in the 2018-2019 RS Annual Assessment Report, the professors for RS 180, the senior seminar class, in spring 2020 began gathering submitted assignments to maintain in the department's Google Drive. Because of the disruptions of the global pandemic, students' final research projects were not suited to the work of assessment. The professors chose several assignments from earlier in the semester for inclusion in the folder instead.
Item: Data-based pedagogical discussions	Response: In the 2019-2020 academic year, the Religious Studies department continued discussing the CUPA assessment from 2018-2019. Please see below in II.A for details of these discussions.
Item: Collaboration with Theresa Covich's tutoring program	Response: The RS GE professors continued to work with the tutoring program organized by Theresa Covich during the 2019-2020 academic year. Dr. Beers and Dr. Yadav both incentivized attendance for struggling students. Dr. Yadav also created quizzes for tutors to give students to help prepare for exams. Dr. Reeder reminded students of tutoring sessions in each class period, and encouraged struggling students to attend through personal emails and in personal meetings. Dr. Richter continued to use tutoring in the Spring. Caylie Cox worked with Jana Mullen to create ZOOM-based tutoring sessions with the students. These seemed to work as well as the in-person meetings. Caylie offered the feedback that the benefit of the online gatherings was that she could record and post them for students who could not attend.

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	Continued work on CUPA ILO Assessment and the GE Common Contexts courses (RS 001, 010, and 020) General Education student learning outcome: Students will demonstrate literacy in Christian scripture and Christian doctrine. <i>See: RS 6 Year Report Action Plan, item 4; Key Questions 5</i>
Who is in Charge /Involved?	(1) Caryn Reeder and Sandra Richter are both members of the CUPA Assessment Team, chaired by Lisa DeBoer. (2) The entire department has been involved in conversations at department meetings throughout the year as detailed below. These conversations continued the work on the CUPA Assessment begun in the 2018-2019 academic year.
<u>Direct Assessment Methods</u>	(1) Old Testament and New Testament assessment surveys were administered at the beginning and end of the semester in fall 2018 and spring 2019 in all RS 001 and RS 010 courses. (2) The CUPA team also administered the assessment surveys, along with questions related to RS 020, to graduating seniors in fall 2018. <i>The surveys are included in Appendix A.</i>
<u>Indirect Assessment Methods</u>	The CUPA team administered the Taylor survey to graduating seniors in fall 2018. The RS department was not involved directly with this assessment.
Major Findings	The Religious Studies Department used department meetings on 17 September 2019, 14 January 2020, and 11 February 2020 to discuss the results of the CUPA Assessment in 2018-2019. We addressed: 1) The value and limitations of the CUPA Assessment Survey: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The assessment survey is useful for identifying factual information that students retained from RS 001, 010, and 020.• The assessment survey was limited in its value as an assessment tool for students' interpretive skill. 2) The results of the survey with respect to the GE learning outcomes for the Common Contexts classes and RS departmental goals: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Between the RS GE courses and graduation, students retained information that was repeated in multiple contexts (other RS GE courses, chapel programming). This material, which particularly reflects major biblical narratives and themes, is useful for identifying points of continuity between the RS GE classes and campus conversations in chapel or elsewhere.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Material with lower rates of retention might have variable explanations; it is difficult to determine from the limited evidence of the surveys. <p>3) Specific pedagogical practices that support students' development towards the learning outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reviewing material and reminding students of concepts, themes, or narratives covered in other RS GE classes is useful for student retention of material. ● While the CUPA Assessment Survey focused on biblical literacy, the RS GE professors also encourage good practices of interpretation through professorial example in class lectures or discussion, small group activities, and creative assignments or essays. <p><i>Please see Appendix B for a fuller presentation of these discussions.</i></p>
<p>Closing the Loop Activities</p>	<p>Department-wide initiatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Since students retained more information that was repeated in multiple contexts, professors will emphasize common themes and connections with other classes throughout the curriculum, including reminding students of what they have learned/will learn in the RS GE classes in order to reinforce concepts, texts, and ideas ● In spring 2020, the department piloted two professor-organized Bible studies for majors, minors, and others to provide students with the opportunity to practice interpretation, and connect the academic study of scripture with the life of faith ● In collaboration with the Provost's Office and Registrar, the department is reserving a certain number of seats in each section of RS 001 and 010 for incoming first year students, to ensure an equitable distribution of students in these classes for fall 2020 <p>Professor-specific developments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dr. Beers has adapted her lectures to provide more space for student discussion in class. She also has begun incorporating potential exam questions into lectures, giving students practice with answering questions. Finally, she has incorporated readings from women and from Christians outside the United States. ● Dr. Farhadian added an assignment requiring students to write a biography of a missionary from diverse backgrounds in Missiology, to give students the opportunity to connect the theoretical material in the course with real people. ● Dr. Nelson received a professional development grant to address support for student learning in RS 001. Dr. Reeder developed a timeline of the biblical narrative (and important contextual historical events) to help students put the pieces together; she uses the timeline as a framing device throughout the semester. ● Dr. Rhee requires students to visit Catholic and Orthodox churches for several weeks, including conversations with priests and parishioners, to help students better understand these traditions. ● Dr. Work created an applied theology project for students to find an application for the material in RS 020 that interests them, encouraging students to be creative in their engagement with their project.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Richter utilizes a timeline, maps, and a rubric of biblical covenants as framing devices throughout the semester to help students put their Bibles together. Periodic, posted essays require the integration of Old and New Testaments as well as mapping of the meta-narrative of Scripture. Discussion forums serve to help students integrate Bible with current and devotional issues.
<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 in the 2018-2019 academic year. The entire department engaged in significant conversations around these topics throughout the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 academic years.</p>	
<p>Program Learning Outcome</p>	<p>Hermeneutical Competence</p> <p><i>Our graduates will employ close reading skills with regard to primary sources: observation; inquiry; attention to genre, context, intertextuality, and literary influence; awareness of their own assumptions and cultural biases; awareness of audience(s) and effect on readers. They will display judicious use of scholarly resources. They will acknowledge dependence and influence through appropriate notes and bibliography. They will appropriate a range of critical methodologies, draw on insights across the range of relevant disciplines, and recognize the insights and pitfalls of various ideological approaches.</i></p>
<p>Who is in Charge /Involved?</p>	<p>Caryn Reeder and Sameer Yadav, co-teachers of RS 180 (Senior Seminar) in spring 2020, conducted the initial assessment. The results were discussed by the entire department in fall 2020.</p>
<p><u>Direct Assessment Methods</u></p>	<p>Student work from RS 180 in spring 2020</p> <p>Because of the disruptions related to the Covid-19 pandemic and the consequent move to online education, students' final research projects were of variable quality. The professors therefore chose to base the PLO assessment on assignments from early in the semester, before the campus closure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Peter 2:11-25 Commentary: Students carried out their own independent research on 1 Peter 2:11-25. In class, following a brief discussion of the text and its contexts, students were given a translation of the text and asked to write interpretive notes based on their own preparatory work, highlighting what they identified as key issues for interpretation. This assignment is particularly useful for assessing students' skills of close reading. • The Ethics of Interpretation: Phil 2:5-11: Students carried out independent research on Philippians 2:5-11. In class, following a lengthy discussion and analysis of the text, students were given one of four essay prompts to respond to, using their own research and the information covered in the class discussion. This assignment is particularly useful for assessing students' skills in critical methodologies and the effects of interpretations of texts on readers. <p><i>These assignments and analyses are in Appendix C.</i></p>

<p><u>Indirect Assessment Methods</u></p>	<p>Student survey responses (Canvas survey)</p> <p>Again, because of the disruptions of spring 2020, relatively few students participated in the survey, and we were unable to host the traditional focus group interview. Seven of the fourteen graduating students did participate in the survey.</p> <p><i>The survey results are included in Appendix D. Please also see the RS department rubric in Appendix E.</i></p>
<p>Major Findings</p>	<p>Assessment of student work: For assignment 1 (fifteen assignments), six papers were assessed as ‘highly developed.’ Four were on the verge of ‘highly developed,’ and three were ‘developing.’ Two papers were assessed as ‘undeveloped’ (but on the verge of ‘developing’). For assignment 2 (sixteen assignments), seven papers were assessed as ‘highly developed,’ and eight were on the verge of ‘highly developed.’ One paper was assessed as ‘undeveloped.’</p> <p>These results suggest that the majority of students are on target; their Religious Studies classes have prepared them to be thoughtful biblical interpreters, and they are able to integrate issues and questions of theology, spiritual development, and ethics. The three ‘undeveloped’ assignments are more concerning, and raise questions for the department to explore and consider in the coming year.</p> <p>Analysis of student survey responses: In general, students rate their skills of hermeneutical competence and theological judgment high, while requesting additional development of curriculum, courses, and faculty guidance to advance ecclesial engagement, particularly with respect to connections between the major and real-world experience in their ongoing connection to their various church affiliations and involvements. While it would be useful to have additional surveys, the seven students who did complete the survey have given us useful information on student perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum, including identifying particular classes that were useful in developing their skills of hermeneutical competence. Also, it is quite clear that our students do not know how to spell ‘hermeneutics.’</p> <p>Some students also remarked on a perceived lack of attention from the department as a whole to address questions of race, racism, and racial identity in their RS experience. They expressed a desire for more class offerings, more departmental involvement in wider campus conversations, and more intentional engagement with the intersection of race and faith for RS students of color.</p>
<p>Closing the Loop Activities</p>	<p>(1) Hermeneutical competence: In the 2020-2021 academic year, the department will address the failure of a small percentage of students to develop hermeneutical competence. Particular points to consider include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Which classes are particularly useful for developing hermeneutical skills? Are there weaknesses in the curriculum that should be addressed? ● Are all students encouraged to take specific courses to develop hermeneutical skills? ● Is it possible to scaffold courses to guide students in their development?

	<p>In their survey responses, students noted several courses that developed their hermeneutical competence. This information will be useful as the department considers these questions and explores adaptations to the curriculum.</p> <p>(2) Citations and bibliographies: Although practices of citation and bibliography were not included in the assessment, faculty have noticed an increasingly problematic lack of understanding and inconsistent use of citations and bibliographies in student work (including among graduating seniors). The department will discuss the possibility of having a department-wide expectation for bibliographic style, and incorporating training in good practices for citations and bibliographies.</p>
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Collaboration and Communication
 Dr. Reeder and Dr. Yadav conducted the initial work of assessing student work and collating survey results. The entire department was involved in discussing the assessment and surveys.

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	Supporting our majors and minors 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. Key question 1: How do we build a robust major that attracts more students? Key question 3: How do we balance academic rigor with the development of Christian affections, spirituality, and practice?
Who was involved in implementation?	All department members engaged in this work by participating in departmental discussions and events. Dr. Beers and Dr. Reeder led Bible studies in spring 2020. In addition, Scott Lisea, campus pastor, joined the department for a discussion in fall 2019.
What was decided or addressed?	This area has been a focus for the department for two years. Students in RS GE classes and RS majors/minors continue to self-report a perceived disconnect of RS classes from the Christian life (as noted in informal conversations, student questions submitted for a department event in fall 2019, and in the senior survey administered in spring 2020). We sponsored one event in fall 2019 to address students’ questions and concerns, and we also piloted two Bible studies in spring 2020 to provide another venue for student engagement.
How were the recommendations implemented?	(1) 24 October 2019: We held a dinner for majors, minors, and interested students. Senior Katie Emert collected questions from students before the event, and professors responded to the questions during the dinner. We also had time for general conversation with smaller groups. (2) Department chapel in 2019: For department chapel, held together with the Philosophy Department, we conducted a liturgical service with student participation. (3) Bible studies: Dr. Beers organized a weekly Bible study on Paul’s letter to the Colossians, and Dr. Reeder hosted a weekly gathering to address biblical texts and Christian traditions related to questions of gender.
Collaboration and Communication All department members engaged in this work, discussing possibilities at department meetings and attending and participating in events. Student participation was high throughout the year, including (for the Bible studies) after the move to online meetings in spring 2020.	

Program Learning Outcome or Key Question	Porter Center Common Room 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. Following the resignation of one department member, an office became available in Porter Center. We plan to turn this office into a common room.
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Who was involved in implementation?	Caryn Reeder and Helen Rhee worked together with Jim Taylor on a request for funding for the common room (though the disruptions of the pandemic have delayed the process). Roz Smith, the RS/Philosophy department assistant, took responsibility for organizing the clearing out of the old furniture from the office.
What was decided or addressed?	Our plan is to furnish the office with armchairs and tables in a flexible arrangement. The office will be used as a student lounge and study space, room for conferences or meetings, and as a space for adjuncts as needed.
How were the recommendations implemented?	We will continue to work with the Philosophy Department to furnish the spare office. We would also like to continue to explore the option of outdoor seating near the main entrance to the building. Given the necessity for social distancing into the coming academic year, an outdoor space may be more usable in the immediate future than an indoor space!
Collaboration and Communication	
The department was involved in discussions concerning the spare office. Caryn Reeder, Helen Rhee, Roz Smith, and Jim Taylor worked particularly closely on developing the funding request and beginning the process of clearing out the spare office.	

IV. Other assessment or Key Questions related projects

Project	
Who is in Charge /Involved?	
Major Findings	
Action	
Collaboration and Communication	

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

Proposed adjustment	Rationale	Timing

VI. Appendices

Appendix A: CUPA Assessment Survey
Appendix B: CUPA Assessment Discussions
Appendix C: Student Work
Appendix D: Senior Survey
Appendix E: Religious Studies Department Assessment Rubric

A draft of this annual report was prepared by Caryn Reeder in consultation with Helen Rhee and Sameer Yadav. The draft was circulated to the entire department, which were discussed and commented on it in a department meeting in September 2020. Department members' comments and suggestions were incorporated into the final version.