**Assessment Committee Feedback for the Religious Studies Department Assessment Report**

**Fall 2011**

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**Summary of Religious Studies’ Assessment Plan**

The faculty members in Religious Studies seek to stimulate in students an appreciation of the spiritual teachings, ethical principles, myths, symbols and rituals of a variety of societies, believing that in them we encounter legitimate human attempts to envision the sacred and to live in the world as a spiritual arena. The Religious Studies department seeks to install comprehensive understanding of religion and its place in both the historical and contemporary societies. In this approach, students in the department can gain a broader understanding of the depth of one's own and others' religious beliefs and practices. The department does not promote any particular, narrow "brand'' of theology or spirituality. Rather, they subscribe to the assertion made by Friedrich Max Muller who said, "Whoever knows only one religion, does not know religion.'' The department encourages their students to explore religion using various modes of analysis, including historical-critical, philosophical and comparative approaches that keep the life of the mind and the life of the soul in creative tension. Furthermore, the Religious Studies department considers the cultivation of communication skills appropriate to their discipline an essential part of their students learning process.

Consistent with their mission, the Religious Studies department has the following learning goals for their students:

Students majoring in Religious Studies will be able…

1. To display basic knowledge of how the world’s major religious traditions emerge from and shape their historical and cultural contexts, as manifested by their oral and scriptural traditions, teachings, practices, and symbolic forms of expression.

2. To interpret these religious phenomena using various methodologies drawn from different disciplinary approaches to the study of religion, such as theological, textual, comparative, and historical analysis.

3. To speak and to write in short and long papers about the world’s religions.

To assess these learning goals the Department uses indirect assessment in the form of surveys and exit interviews with graduating seniors. In 2011 each faculty member also used direct assessment by issuing an assignment emphasizing Learning Goal 2 (learning goal 1 was assessed in 2010). The department met as a whole to discuss, summarize, and respond to their students’ strengths and weaknesses in mastering this learning goal as reflected by their performance.

**Outcomes of Assessment**

Indirect assessment

*Self-satisfaction surveys*

For a second year in a row, Religious Studies had moderate to low returns on surveys given to their graduating majors and minors. Only 3 of 7 graduating majors and 3 of 12 minors completed the survey. This aside, all students who did return surveys indicated satisfaction with the faculty members, the approach the department takes to Religious studies (non-dogmatic), the emphasis on world religions, and the connections religious and historic/cultural phenomena. Again (as in 2010) students requested more course opportunities Asian and comparative religious studies.

*Exit Interviews*

Religious Studies conducted exit interviews with graduating majors and minors. Three of seven major and one minor took part in this process. The participating students offered many suggestions to the department as pathways to improvement.

*Immediate Profession Plans*

Three of seven majors and five of twelve minors informed the department of their immediate plans following graduation. It is diverse set of career paths, many of which are starting at impressive graduate institutions. Collecting such data can provide for indirect validation of your department’s preparation of its students. We commend you on your efforts.

Direct Assessment

As previously mentioned, during the 2010-2011 academic year Religious Studies performed direct assessment of learning goal 2 of their assessment plan. To achieve this every professor selected one assignment from one of their courses that highlight student performance toward mastering this learning goal. The assignments were varied, but consistent with the learning goal as it pertained to the particular class. The assessment covered one 100 level course and three 200 level courses. Students were evaluated on a *strong/adequate/weak* scale (or similar). Most classes had very few students in the *weak/unacceptable* group, and several had 1:1 or 2:1 populations in the *strong:adequate* categories.

The department discussed the results of all assessment pieces as a group. The religious studies faculty members felt that no changes were warranted by the Likert-scale questions on the indirect assessment pieces. The faculty members agreed with several of the suggestions from the open ended questions, especially with respect to the need for more Asian and comparative religious studies classes. Actions based on the outcomes form the direct assessment pieces are being left to the discretion of the individual faculty members.

**Recommendations**

I would like to thank you for your hard work in the realm of assessment. As has been the case for the past two years, it is clear that considerable effort has been placed in the creation and execution of your assessment plan. You have learning goals that are consistent with your mission and clearly mapped to your curriculum. Furthermore, it is clear that you took into consideration recommendations that were made in the feedback offered in 2010 regarding the reporting of your direct assessment. The description and analysis of these instruments was very clear and greatly appreciated. I believe that the detail you placed in your report would make your data assessable to a reader from outside the College.

The only suggestions I have at this time are with respect to student completion of the self-satisfaction survey and your exit interviews.

1) Will you please include a copy of your self-satisfaction survey, and questions asked in your exit interviews as an appendix in your next assessment report. It would be beneficial to the readers to see this information.

2) Your students have recommended that you have more social events as a department. I wonder if you had a spring semester event, e.g., dinner, barbeque, picnic, etc., and you handed out the surveys to your students to complete at this event, would you get higher returns? Is there a concern that asking the students to complete and return the survey in the presence of the faculty members (and department staff) would skew the data in some way?

Outside of these minor considerations, your report was excellent and appreciated. Please continue the outstanding work.