

Departmental and Program Assessment Annual Assessment Plan Report

Academic Year: 2007-2008

Academic Department or Program: Religion

Chair: McDaniel

Assessment Plan

- Is there an assessment plan for your department or program? (It should be on the web at <http://www.hendrix.edu/academics/academics.aspx?id=7264> <<http://www.hendrix.edu/academics/academics.aspx?id=7264>> . If not, explain when one will be completed.)
- **Yes.**

Does the assessment plan include stated student learning goals? (If so, then copy or attach them. Goals should be able to stand alone as a list without pages of explanatory commentary. If not, explain when a list of student learning goals will be available.)

Members of the Department of Religion met on two occasions to discuss our learning goals: Monday, March 24, from 2 – 3 pm; March 31, from 2 – 4. We also attended sessions offered by the college as a whole on assessment, including a special session in the Burrow led by Stephen Kerr and Alice Hines on Thursday, April 17. As a result of our discussions we arrived at the following learning goals for majors.

- An introductory knowledge of subject matter within a broad array of sub-disciplines within the field of religion.
- A capacity to understand different kinds of religious phenomena—including texts, practices, experiences, historical events, communities and ideas—through a variety of interpretive lenses.
- Experience with ways of developing a sympathetic understanding of diverse religious traditions, engaging in thoughtful reflection on religious questions and traditions, and participating in constructive dialogue with others.
- An acquaintance with and an ability to employ theories of and methods for studying religion.
- A demonstrated ability to conduct research in religious studies and to articulate ideas coherently both in speech and in writing.

Does the assessment plan include a list of assessment data that are collected each year? (If so, then copy or attach the list. Assessment data lists should be able to stand alone as a list without pages of explanatory commentary. If not, explain when a list of assessments will be available. You do **not** need to submit any of your data, but it should be on file in your department.)

- [Integrate course evaluations by students into the assessment of outcomes of our teaching.](#) Course evaluations from 2007-2008 are on file in the department.

- Assemble a cross section of written assignments from each course and periodically ask experts from other institutions to help us evaluate them. Written assignments have been kept by some professors; but we have not asked experts from other institutions to evaluate them. Dr. Jane Harris is sending a sample of senior seminar essays to a colleague.
- Compile a list of Religion majors over the last five years and make an attempt to contact them, with a brief questionnaire. We did this in 2006-2007. An anonymous questionnaire was sent to students, and the responses have been very helpful. The results of that survey were distributed to faculty in the Department of Religion.
- Keeping on file unsolicited statements from recent graduates. We have a special notebook in the office of the secretary, within which we keep unsolicited statements sent to faculty.
- Collect the written work of seniors during the comprehensive examination. Individual faculty within the Department receive and grade different senior theses. For this reason we did not have a single site where all were kept in 2006-2007. However, in 2007-2008 we have asked all seniors to submit their papers to Dr. Harris, who, on receiving them, will place them in the notebook identified above.
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- Record the oral portion of comprehensive examination. Students presented their senior seminar papers to their peers, but they were not recorded. However, this year the Department of Religion helped sponsor a special weekend Student Undergraduate Research conference in which five senior religion majors presented papers. This was attended by Professors Sanders and McDaniel.
- Has your department or program done an assessment audit of your courses to determine how course goals match overall student learning goals? (This has not been required of departments, but it is a recommended exercise that was explained at the most recent chairs' assessment workshop. If you have done this, please report the results.) This was our first year to work with our new curriculum, having developed it last year in light of the fact we had two new faculty members. At the end of last year we discovered that we would be losing our faculty member in Biblical studies, so much of this year was devoted to a successful search for a new biblical studies person. This search absorbed most of our fall semester and even into the early spring. After the search was completed, we met three times during the spring to discuss assessment and establish learning goals. We spend much time discussing our aims and also discussing which among them were measurable and which not. We grew in our realization that we have different aims for different courses and also among different faculty. Accordingly, we developed a set of new aims (see above) with which we are very happy. Our next task – for the fall of 2009 – is to go over courses and determine which of the aims they respectively satisfy.
- Are department or program student learning goals available to students? Are student learning goals included in course syllabi in your department or program? Yes, through the link to our Assessment Document on the Hendrix web page. However, the learning goals – stated exactly as they appear above -- have not been typically included. Other more general goals, distinctive to each professor, have more typically been the norm. Now that we have established our new and improved goals, we plan to put them on the Religion Department website.

Student Assessments

Describe which *direct* assessments in your assessment plan have been collected for the year and which have not. ["Direct" refers to evaluated student work.] [Please see above.](#)

- Describe which indirect assessments in your assessment plan have been collected for the year and which have not. ["Indirect" refers to student surveys or opinions]

Assessment Planning

- How is information about student learning shared and used for department or program decision making? (Each department and program is expected to have discussions of at least two hours each academic year to discuss assessment. If you have met, briefly summarize the meeting. If you have not met, when do you plan to meet?) [As stated above, we had three distinct meetings in the Spring, each lasting approximately an hour and a half. Our topics for discussion included a discussion of goals and measuring learning outcomes, and also a consideration of a "rubric" developed by the Department of Religion at Grace College, which was shared with us by Dr. Robert Mesle of the Philosophy and Religion Department. In our discussions we](#)
- Describe any curricular or other programmatic changes that have been made that were based (at least in part) on the availability of your assessment data. [See above. The entire curriculum was redone in 2006-2007. Given that we have a new person in biblical studies, it will need to be redone again next year, too; adding his distinctive version of a biblical studies curriculum.](#)
- Describe any changes in the Assessment Plan that have been made during this academic year. (If changes have been made, please submit an electronic copy of the revised plan to Amanda Hurd.) [See above.](#)
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- What are the department or program's plans for improving student learning in the major? [We plan, with help from the Religious Life Council, to sponsor the Undergraduate Research conference next year, at which we will ask all of our seniors to deliver their papers. It is important to add that this was sponsored by the Odyssey Program as well. Students who presented papers this year had attended the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, with help from the Odyssey initiative. We do not know if students can attend that again, but we do know that the follow-up – the undergraduate conference – is something we want to attend.](#)