

Hendrix Religious Studies 2023 Major Assessment Report

*Submitted by
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May 17, 2023*

Student Learning Goal for Assessment

In keeping with the schedule outlined in our Student Assessment Plan, in 2022-23 the Religious Studies program is assessing Learning Goal 3. That goal reads:

“Students completing a major in Religious Studies will be able to demonstrate proficiency in a chosen tradition, method, or sub-discipline within the academic study of religion.”

Assessment Meeting

The Religious Studies faculty held our annual assessment meeting on May 16, 2023, from 12-2 p.m. in Ellis Hall. Drs. Barringer, Corey, Gorvine, and Williamson were present.

Assessment Data

The faculty assessed the learning goal both directly and indirectly following our assessment plan. At the recommendation of the Assessment Committee, we analyzed cumulative assessment data from the past four years (2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22, and 2022-23).

Direct assessment data for Learning Goal 3 was based on assessment of the student senior capstone projects. Direct assessment data for Learning Goal 1 is presented in Appendix A.

Indirect assessment data for Learning Goal 3 was collected through a student survey administered via SurveyMonkey (2020, 2021) and Teams (2023). We received a total of 9 responses to the survey out of 12 graduating seniors over that period, a response rate of 75%. Indirect assessment data for Learning Goal 3 is presented in Appendix B.

In addition, the complete data for all learning goals collected in 2023 is presented in Appendix C (direct assessment) and Appendix D (indirect assessment).

The cumulative data for all years from 2019-20 through 2022-23 is presented in Appendix E (direct assessment) and Appendix F (indirect assessment).

Interpretation of Data

Indirect assessment of Learning Goal 3 over the past four years indicates that, to a high degree, students understand themselves to be achieving this goal. Students were asked to what extent

they agree with the statement, “As a result of my major in Religious Studies I have gained proficiency in a particular tradition, method, or sub-discipline within the academic study of religion.” Of the 9 students responding, 8 of them indicated that they “strongly agree” with the statement, while 1 indicated that they “agree.” On a Likert scale, the overall response was 4.89/5.00. From the student perspective, it seems that we are accomplishing this learning goal.

The results of our direct assessment of student achievement in this area was more mixed. Of the 12 graduates over the past four years, our direct measures assessed 5 of them as “high achieving,” 4 as “competent,” and 3 as “needs improvement.” Of the students assessed as needing improvement, there was one student in the each of the graduating classes of 2019-20, 2020-21, and 2022-23. That indicates that, while the significant majority of our students are achieving this learning goal based on our direct assessment, there is a persistent pattern of a small number of students failing to meet this learning goal each year.

We also noted the discrepancy between student assessment of their own achievement in this learning goal and the faculty assessment of their learning in this area.

Discussion of the Data

In response to this data, the faculty considered a number of possible responses. First, we noted that the language of a “chosen tradition, method, or sub-discipline” comes from an earlier version of the Religious Studies major in which students were required to commit to a specific concentration at the end of their junior year. In response to concerns from the Office of the Registrar about the difficulty of auditing the concentration, we eliminated that requirement in the 2021-22 revision of the Religious Studies major. This means that we no longer have a formal discussion with our students about their “chosen” focus prior to the start of their senior projects in RELI 497 during the fall of their senior year. This might also mean that students themselves may know what their “chosen” focus is while the faculty do not know. This might account, at least in part, for the discrepancy between student assessment of their own learning and our assessment of their learning.

We also recognized that our direct assessment of this learning goal relies entirely on the senior capstone experience. While the capstone should certainly reflect their competence in their chosen areas, by itself it may not be representative of the student’s overall achievement of this learning goal.

Nonetheless the Religious Studies faculty agreed that there are steps we could take to ensure more consistent student achievement of this learning goal. As a result of this discussion, we plan to take the following steps:

- (1) Remove the word “chosen” from the learning goal. We observed that many students do seem to have achieved competence in a particular tradition, method, or sub-discipline (and our high-achieving students in more than one) such that our assessment of their learning may have less to do with their level of achievement and more to do with the faculty’s lack of clarity about how each student would define their own chosen area.

- (2) Add an assignment to RELI 209 “What Is Religion?” asking students to identify particular traditions, methods, or subdisciplines that are of interest to them at that early stage in their major. This will help students identify their own developing interests and give faculty insight into their own sense of focus.
- (3) Consider adding an assignment to our 300-level courses asking students to reflect on how that particular class has developed their understanding of their interests in the study of religion. This would keep students thinking about how their interests are developing through the major and keep faculty informed about their process.
- (4) Emphasize the question of focus within Religious Studies in advising meetings with our junior and senior major advisees as they select their upper-level courses.
- (5) Adjust our rubric for assessing Learning Goal 3 to include items beyond the senior capstone such as faculty assessment of performance in coursework and reflective assignments in RELI 497 beyond the senior capstone project itself.

Review of Progress on Learning Goal 1

In 2020-21, our assessment of Learning Goal 1 indicated that our students were not consistently accomplishing that learning goal: “Students completing a major in Religious Studies will be able to express an empathetic understanding of a diversity of religious traditions.” In response, we revised the major by eliminating the requirement for the one-semester course RELI 110 World Religions and replacing it with the two-course sequence RELI 111 Asian Religions and RELI 113 Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Retirements in our department also shifted the balance of our course offerings toward Asian religions more than had previously been the case.

Our 2020-21 Assessment Report made the following observation:

In our direct assessment, students all achieved competence in empathy for diverse religious traditions, with one student being assessed as high achieving. By contrast, for understanding diverse traditions, 4 students ranked in the “Needs Improvement” category, with 2 achieving competence and 1 ranked as high achieving. Indirect assessment of the learning goal generally corroborates these results, with 2 students strongly agreeing that they had achieved the learning goal and 4 agreeing.

Our 2022-23 data, by contrast, suggest a marked improvement in achievement of this learning goal. All of our graduates responding to the senior survey marked themselves as “strongly agreeing” that they had both gained knowledge of a diversity of traditions and learned to express that knowledge empathetically. Likewise, our direct assessment indicated that all four of our 2022-23 graduates were “high achieving” in their ability to express empathy for diverse traditions and that 3 of the 4 were “high achieving” in their understanding of diverse traditions, with the other being “competent.”

While more years of data are obviously necessary to corroborate the shift, these early data are positive indicators that our major revisions have had the intended effect.

Appendix A.
RELI Direct Assessment of Learning Goal 3 (2019-23)

LG #	Learning Goal	Artifact	High Achieving	Competent	Needs Improvement	Unsatisfactory
3	demonstrates proficiency in a chosen tradition, method, or sub-discipline within the academic study of religion	Senior Project	The project demonstrates exceptional understanding of a particular tradition, method, or subdiscipline in the study of religion.	The project demonstrates a competent understanding of a particular tradition, method, or subdiscipline in the study of religion but lacks sophistication.	The project demonstrates a general awareness of a particular tradition, method, or subdiscipline in the study of religion but lacks depth and clarity.	The project fails to engage a chosen tradition, method, or subdiscipline within the study of religion, or demonstrates significant misunderstanding or misrepresentation.
Students in Category			5	4	3	0

Appendix B.
Indirect Assessment of Learning Goal 3 (2019-23)

	As a result of my major in Religious Studies I have...	# Respond	AVG	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4.	gained proficiency in a particular tradition, method, or sub-discipline within the academic study of religion.	9	4.89	8	1	0	0	0

Appendix C.
RELI Direct Assessment Rubric 2022-23

LG #	Learning Goal	Artifact	High Achieving	Competent	Needs Improvement	Unsatisfactory
1.1	expresses an empathetic understanding of a diversity of religious traditions	Exit Interview (Q3)	In responding to the question, the student speaks of diverse traditions in exceptionally thoughtful and respectful ways.	In responding to the question, the student speaks of other traditions thoughtfully and respectfully.	In responding to the question, the student struggles to speak of diverse traditions thoughtfully and respectfully.	In responding to the question, the student speaks of diverse traditions in negative or insulting ways.
Students in Category			4	0	0	0
1.1	expresses an empathetic understanding of a diversity of religious traditions	Faculty Assessment	Through coursework, the student has demonstrated an exceptional capacity to engage diverse traditions in thoughtful and respectful ways	Through coursework, the student has generally been thoughtful and respectful in their engagement with diverse religious traditions	Through coursework, the student has struggled to be thoughtful and respectful in their engagement with diverse religious traditions	Through coursework, the student has been unable to engage diverse religious traditions in thoughtful and respectful ways.
Students in Category			4	0	0	0
1.2	expresses an empathetic understanding of a diversity of religious traditions	Exit Interview (Q3)	Without prompting, the student identifies insightful points about a tradition outside their concentration.	Without prompting, the student identifies relevant points about a tradition outside their concentration.	With prompting, the student identifies relevant points about a tradition outside their concentration.	Even with prompting, the student is unable to identify relevant points about a tradition outside their concentration
Students in Category			4	0	0	0
1.2	expresses an empathetic understanding of a diversity of religious traditions	Faculty Assessment	Through coursework, the student has demonstrated an exceptional understanding of a diversity of religious traditions	Through coursework, the student has demonstrated undersetanding of a diversity of religious traditions	Through coursework, the student has struggled to understand diverse religious traditions or has had minimal coursework related to diversity.	Through coursework, the student has not developed an understanding of diverse religious traditions
Students in Category			3	1	0	0
2.1	thinks critically and constructively about religion through engagement with appropriate cultural resources	Senior Project	The project engages in a sophisticated critical analysis of the chosen topic.	The project engages in critical analysis of the chosen topic but lacks sophistication.	The project engages in analysis but lacks critical discernment.	The project lacks critical analysis or asserts points without support.
Students in Category			2	1	1	0
2.2	thinks critically and constructively about religion through engagement with appropriate cultural resources	Senior Project	The project makes an original contribution to the field of religion, whether intellectual or practical.	The project makes a contribution to the field of religion, whether intellectual or practical, resembling similar contributions of others.	The project makes a contribution, whether intellectual or practical, merely by replicating the work of others	The project makes no discernible contribution to the field of religion, whether intellectual or practical.
Students in Category			2	1	1	0
2.3	thinks critically and constructively about religion through engagement with appropriate cultural resources	Senior Project	The project draws on well-selected cultural artifacts going beyond the most obvious.	The project draws on appropriate cultural artifacts but only the most obvious.	The project engages cultural artifacts but omits relevant artifacts or includes irrelevant artifacts.	The project fails to address relevant cultural artifacts.
Students in Category			2	1	1	0
3	demonstrates proficiency in a chosen tradition, method, or sub-discipline within the academic study of religion	Senior Project	The project demonstrates exceptional understanding of a particular tradition, method, or subdiscipline in the study of religion.	The project demonstrates a competent understanding of a particular tradition, method, or subdiscipline in the study of religion but lacks sophistication.	The project demonstrates a general awareness of a particular tradition, method, or subdiscipline in the study of religion but lacks depth and clarity.	The project fails to engage a chosen tradition, method, or subdiscipline within the study of religion, or demonstrates significant misunderstanding or misrepresentation.
Students in Category			2	1	1	0
4	reflects with critical self-awareness on their own orientation to religion	Exit Interview (Q4)	Without prompting, the student identifies insightful developments in their understanding of their own orientation to religion.	Without prompting, the student identifies one or more developments in their understanding of their own orientation to religion	With prompting, the student identifies one or more developments in their understanding of their own orientation to religion.	Even with prompting, the student is unable to identify developments in their understanding of their own orientation to religion.
Students in Category			4	0	0	0

Appendix C.
RELI Direct Assessment Rubric 2022-23

4	reflects with critical self-awareness on their own orientation to religion	Faculty Assessment	In coursework and conversation, the student demonstrates exceptional self-awareness and the ability to be critical of their own orientation to religion	In coursework and conversation, the student demonstrates the capacity to reflect critically on their own orientation to religion	In coursework and conversation, the student often lacks self-awareness about their own orientation to religion	In coursework and conversation, the student refuses to engage in critical self-reflection about their own orientation to religion
Students in Category			4	0	0	0
5.1	communicates effectively orally and in writing in keeping with the standards of religious studies discourse	Senior Oral Presentation	The oral presentation communicates the details of the project with exceptional clarity. The use of visuals enhances the presentation. The student responds insightfully to questions.	The oral presentation communicates the essentials of the project clearly and appropriately. The use of visuals complements the presentation. The student gives informed responses to questions.	The oral presentation communicates some aspects of the project but lacks clarity or completeness. Visuals are lacking or confusing. The student gives vague or evasive answers to questions.	The oral presentation fails to communicate the basic ideas of the project. Visuals are missing or detract from the presentation. The student is unable to respond or gives ill-informed responses to questions.
Students in Category			2	2	0	0
5.2	communicates effectively orally and in writing in keeping with the standards of religious studies discourse	Senior Project	The written project is exemplary in its clarity, organization, expression, and documentation.	The written project communicates its ideas clearly but lacks in terms of clarity, organization, expression, and/or documentation.	The written project can be understood by the reader but its effectiveness is hindered by issues with clarity, organization, expression, and/or documentation.	The written project cannot be understood by the reader because of issues with clarity, organization, expression, and/or documentation.
Students in Category			2	1	1	0
6	articulates their academic interests and abilities in terms of career competencies valued by potential employers	RELI 497 Competencies Assgt.	Clearly and thoughtfully connects the finer points of their academic experience with career competencies.	Connects the most significant aspects of their academic interests and abilities with career competencies but overlooks others.	Connects only the most obvious aspects of their academic interests and abilities with career competencies.	Unable to connect even the most obvious aspects of their academic interests and abilities with career competencies.
Students in Category			4	0	0	0

Appendix D.
RELI Senior Survey 2022-23

	As a result of my major in Religious Studies I have...	# Respond	AVG	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Comments
1.	gained factual knowledge of a diversity of religious traditions	3	5.00	3	0	0	0	0	
2.	learned to express my knowledge of those traditions in ways their adherents would recognize as true	3	5.00	3	0	0	0	0	
3.	developed the capacity to think critically and constructively about religion through engagement with appropriate cultural resources	3	5.00	3	0	0	0	0	
4.	gained proficiency in a particular tradition, method, or sub-discipline within the academic study of religion.	3	5.00	3	0	0	0	0	
5.	developed a critical self-awareness about my own orientation to religion	3	5.00	3	0	0	0	0	
6.	learned to communicate effectively in writing	3	4.67	2	1	0	0	0	
7.	learned to communicate effectively orally	3	5.00	3	0	0	0	0	
8.	learned to articulate my academic interests and abilities in terms of career competencies valued by potential employers.	3	5.00	3	0	0	0	0	

Appendix E.
RELI Direct Assessment Rubric 2019-23

LG #	Learning Goal	Artifact	High Achieving	Competent	Needs Improvement	Unsatisfactory
1.1	expresses an empathetic understanding of a diversity of religious traditions	Exit Interview (Q3)	In responding to the question, the student speaks of diverse traditions in exceptionally thoughtful and respectful ways.	In responding to the question, the student speaks of other traditions thoughtfully and respectfully.	In responding to the question, the student struggles to speak of diverse traditions thoughtfully and respectfully.	In responding to the question, the student speaks of diverse traditions in negative or insulting ways.
Students in Category			5	1	0	0
1.1	expresses an empathetic understanding of a diversity of religious traditions	Faculty Assessment	Through coursework, the student has demonstrated an exceptional capacity to engage diverse traditions in thoughtful and respectful ways	Through coursework, the student has generally been thoughtful and respectful in their engagement with diverse religious traditions	Through coursework, the student has struggled to be thoughtful and respectful in their engagement with diverse religious traditions	Through coursework, the student has been unable to engage diverse religious traditions in thoughtful and respectful ways.
Students in Category			5	7	0	0
1.2	expresses an empathetic understanding of a diversity of religious traditions	Exit Interview (Q3)	Without prompting, the student identifies insightful points about a tradition outside their concentration.	Without prompting, the student identifies relevant points about a tradition outside their concentration.	With prompting, the student identifies relevant points about a tradition outside their concentration.	Even with prompting, the student is unable to identify relevant points about a tradition outside their concentration
Students in Category			5	1	0	0
1.2	expresses an empathetic understanding of a diversity of religious traditions	Faculty Assessment	Through coursework, the student has demonstrated an exceptional understanding of a diversity of religious traditions	Through coursework, the student has demonstrated undersetanding of a diversity of religious traditions	Through coursework, the student has struggled to understand diverse religious traditions or has had minimal coursework related to diversity.	Through coursework, the student has not developed an understanding of diverse religious traditions
Students in Category			4	4	4	0
2.1	thinks critically and constructively about religion through engagement with appropriate cultural resources	Senior Project	The project engages in a sophisticated critical analysis of the chosen topic.	The project engages in critical analysis of the chosen topic but lacks sophistication.	The project engages in analysis but lacks critical discernment.	The project lacks critical analysis or asserts points without support.
Students in Category			4	5	2	1
2.2	thinks critically and constructively about religion through engagement with appropriate cultural resources	Senior Project	The project makes an original contribution to the field of religion, whether intellectual or practical.	The project makes a contribution to the field of religion, whether intellectual or practical, resembling similar contributions of others.	The project makes a contribution, whether intellectual or practical, merely by replicating the work of others	The project makes no discernible contribution to the field of religion, whether intellectual or practical.
Students in Category			6	3	2	1
2.3	thinks critically and constructively about religion through engagement with appropriate cultural resources	Senior Project	The project draws on well-selected cultural artifacts going beyond the most obvious.	The project draws on appropriate cultural artifacts but only the most obvious.	The project engages cultural artifacts but omits relevant artifacts or includes irrelevant artifacts.	The project fails to address relevant cultural artifacts.
Students in Category			5	3	4	0
3	demonstrates proficiency in a chosen tradition, method, or sub-discipline within the academic study of religion	Senior Project	The project demonstrates exceptional understanding of a particular tradition, method, or subdiscipline in the study of religion.	The project demonstrates a competent understanding of a particular tradition, method, or subdiscipline in the study of religion but lacks sophistication.	The project demonstrates a general awareness of a particular tradition, method, or subdiscipline in the study of religion but lacks depth and clarity.	The project fails to engage a chosen tradition, method, or subdiscipline within the study of religion, or demonstrates significant misunderstanding or misrepresentation.
Students in Category			5	4	3	0
4	reflects with critical self-awareness on their own orientation to religion	Exit Interview (Q4)	Without prompting, the student identifies insightful developments in their understanding of their own orientation to religion.	Without prompting, the student identifies one or more developments in their understanding of their own orientation to religion	With prompting, the student identifies one or more developments in their understanding of their own orientation to religion.	Even with prompting, the student is unable to identify developments in their understanding of their own orientation to religion.
Students in Category			6	0	0	0

Appendix E.
RELI Direct Assessment Rubric 2019-23

4	reflects with critical self-awareness on their own orientation to religion	Faculty Assessment	In coursework and conversation, the student demonstrates exceptional self-awareness and the ability to be critical of their own orientation to religion	In coursework and conversation, the student demonstrates the capacity to reflect critically on their own orientation to religion	In coursework and conversation, the student often lacks self-awareness about their own orientation to religion	In coursework and conversation, the student refuses to engage in critical self-reflection about their own orientation to religion
Students in Category			11	1	0	0
5.1	communicates effectively orally and in writing in keeping with the standards of religious studies discourse	Senior Oral Presentation	The oral presentation communicates the details of the project with exceptional clarity. The use of visuals enhances the presentation. The student responds insightfully to questions.	The oral presentation communicates the essentials of the project clearly and appropriately. The use of visuals complements the presentation. The student gives informed responses to questions.	The oral presentation communicates some aspects of the project but lacks clarity or completeness. Visuals are lacking or confusing. The student gives vague or evasive answers to questions.	The oral presentation fails to communicate the basic ideas of the project. Visuals are missing or detract from the presentation. The student is unable to respond or gives ill-informed responses to questions.
Students in Category			6	3	2	0
5.2	communicates effectively orally and in writing in keeping with the standards of religious studies discourse	Senior Project	The written project is exemplary in its clarity, organization, expression, and documentation.	The written project communicates its ideas clearly but lacks in terms of clarity, organization, expression, and/or documentation.	The written project can be understood by the reader but its effectiveness is hindered by issues with clarity, organization, expression, and/or documentation.	The written project cannot be understood by the reader because of issues with clarity, organization, expression, and/or documentation.
Students in Category			6	3	3	0
6	articulates their academic interests and abilities in terms of career competencies valued by potential employers	RELI 497 Competencies Assgt.	Clearly and thoughtfully connects the finer points of their academic experience with career competencies.	Connects the most significant aspects of their academic interests and abilities with career competencies but overlooks others.	Connects only the most obvious aspects of their academic interests and abilities with career competencies.	Unable to connect even the most obvious aspects of their academic interests and abilities with career competencies.
Students in Category			11	0	0	0

Appendix F.

RELI Senior Survey 2019-23

	As a result of my major in Religious Studies I have...	# Respond	AVG	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	gained factual knowledge of a diversity of religious traditions	9	4.56	5	4	0	0	0
2.	learned to express my knowledge of those traditions in ways their adherents would recognize as true	9	4.44	5	3	1	0	0
3.	developed the capacity to think critically and constructively about religion through engagement with appropriate cultural resources	9	4.89	8	1	0	0	0
4.	gained proficiency in a particular tradition, method, or sub-discipline within the academic study of religion.	9	4.89	8	1	0	0	0
5.	developed a critical self-awareness about my own orientation to religion	9	4.89	8	1	0	0	0
6.	learned to communicate effectively in writing	9	4.67	6	3	0	0	0
7.	learned to communicate effectively orally	9	4.89	8	1	0	0	0
8.	learned to articulate my academic interests and abilities in terms of career competencies valued by potential employers.	9	4.89	8	1	0	0	0