

Hendrix Religious Studies 2021 Departmental Assessment Report

*Submitted by
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Student Learning Goal for Assessment

For 2020-21, the department is assessing Learning Goal 1. That goal reads:

“Students completing a major in Religious Studies will be able to express an empathetic understanding of a diversity of religious traditions.”

Assessment Data

The department 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 two years (2019-20 and 2020-21).

Direct assessment data for Learning Goal 1 included assessment of the student senior projects, faculty assessments of overall student performance in Religious Studies courses, and assessment of senior exit interview. These measures were recorded in our departmental assessment meetings on May 19, 2020, and May 26, 2021. (Exit interview data was not collected in 2020 due to COVID-19). Direct assessment data for Learning Goal 1 is presented in Appendix A.

Indirect assessment data for Learning Goal 1 was collected through a student survey administered via SurveyMonkey. We received a total of 6 responses to the survey out of 7 graduating seniors, a response rate of 86%. Indirect assessment data for Learning Goal 1 is presented in Appendix B.

In addition, the complete data for all learning goals collected in 2021 is presented in Appendix C (direct assessment) and Appendix D (indirect assessment).

Interpretation of Data

Direct assessment of Learning Goal 1 over the past two years indicates that while students are generally achieving competence in the stated learning goal, there is substantial room for improvement. In fact, of the six departmental learning goals, this goal scored the lowest in both direct and indirect measures over the past two years.

The assessment data focuses on two different aspects of Learning Goal 1: understanding of diverse religious traditions and empathy for those traditions. Students generally rate higher for empathy for other traditions than for understanding of those traditions. 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.

Future Directions

Prior to 2013, the Religious Studies major included distribution requirements that assured all students graduating from the program would have at least two courses relating to religious traditions other than Christianity. In our 2013 revision of the major, we eliminated the distribution requirements to simplify the major and to give students more control over their concentration within the major. In order to assure that students continued to have diversity in their Religious Studies coursework, we created a requirement that students create a 3-course concentration with 4 courses selected outside the concentration in consultation with an advisor. In 2019, we revised the major again, eliminating the concentration requirement in order to make the major easier to audit for purposes of the registrar. The result is a highly flexible major that students can tailor to their particular interests.

While there were (and continue to be) good reasons for making these revisions, our concern at the time was that students might self-select into courses of study that emphasized their own religious orientation (Christian, generally) at the expense of substantive engagement with diverse traditions. The results of the present assessment suggest that that our concern was realistic and that students have, in fact, narrowed in their engagement with diverse traditions. While we continue to cultivate empathy for diverse traditions, both our own assessment of students and their assessment of themselves suggest that their understanding of (and, to a degree, appreciation for) traditions outside their main area of interest does not consistently meet departmental expectations. (By contrast, as the complete data set indicates, their learning in their identified area of concentration is quite strong.)

In order to address this issue, the department will revise the major to insure deeper engagement with a diversity of Religious traditions. Specifically, we will eliminate the RELI 110 World Religions requirement and replace it with a two-course sequence consisting of RELI 111 Introduction to Asian Religions and a new course (RELI 1xx) Introduction to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This two-course sequence will insure that our majors spend at least two semesters examining diverse religious traditions and will allow us to cover each of the major religious traditions in more depth than in the current one-course model.

Appendix A.
Cumulative Direct Assessment Data for LG 1
2019-21

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			1	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			1	6	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			1	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 understanding 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			1	2	4	0

* No exit interview data was recorded for 2019-20 due to COVID-19.

Appendix B.
Cumulative Indirect Assessment of LG 1
2019-21

	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	6	4.33	2	4	0	0	0	
2.	learned to express my knowledge of those traditions in ways their adherents would recognize as true	6	4.17	2	3	1	0	0	

Appendix C.
RELI Direct Assessment Rubric 2020-21

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			1	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			1	2	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			1	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 understanding 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			1	0	2	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			1	2	0	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	0	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			1	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			1	1	1	0

Appendix C.
RELI Direct Assessment Rubric 2020-21

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			2	0	0	0
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			3	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	0	1	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	0	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			3	0	0	0

**Appendix D.
RELI Senior Survey 2021**

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	2	4.00	0	2	0	0	0	
2. learned to express my knowledge of those traditions in ways their adherents would recognize as true	2	4.00	0	2	0	0	0	
3. developed the capacity to think critically and constructively about religion through engagement with appropriate cultural resources	2	5.00	2	0	0	0	0	
4. gained proficiency in a particular tradition, method, or sub-discipline within the academic study of religion.	2	5.00	2	0	0	0	0	
5. developed a critical self-awareness about my own orientation to religion	2	5.00	2	0	0	0	0	
6. learned to communicate effectively in writing	2	5.00	2	0	0	0	0	
7. learned to communicate effectively orally	2	5.00	2	0	0	0	0	
8. learned to articulate my academic interests and abilities in terms of career competencies valued by potential employers.	2	5.00	2	0	0	0	0	