

## Departmental Assessment Meeting: Report

Please fill out this report based on your department's conversation and return via e-mail to Megan Leonard or Sasha Pfau by March 31, 2017.

### Summary of past decisions

Please summarize up to three departmental changes made since the last HLC visit (08-09) the impetus for those changes and any changes to information gathering about student development.

Since the last visit of the Higher Learning Commission, our department has been very active in an ongoing process of self-assessment that has led to a number of changes. Some highlights of our collective work include:

- a 2010 survey of students interested in religious studies (including but not limited to current or prospective majors and minors)
- a 2011 Ten-Year Self-Assessment that reviewed a 2000-01 report and addressed departmental changes and the department's evolving role in achieving the goals of the college
- a 2012-13 revision of the major that actively responded to the student survey results, along with the consensus views of department faculty. (The revision principally involved movement away from certain distribution categories that had previously governed the major in favor of a model that better supported depth (in the form of a chosen "concentration) in addition to breadth, as well as interdisciplinary work (by allowing a course from outside Religious Studies to count toward the concentration.)
  - one of the goals of the revision was to structure the major so as to improve the preparedness of students to complete the Senior Thesis capstone requirement, based on faculty recognition that some students were inadequately equipped for some of the projects they proposed.
- a 2015 grant the department secured to re-envision our senior capstone over a two year period. This took the form of a \$30k Lilly Endowment/Wabash Center Undergraduate Departments of Religion Project Grant, and has involved work with outside consultants, grant-writing and assessment professionals, and regular on-campus meetings to rethink both the capstone experience itself and the broader curriculum that is anticipated by it. This process has included:
  - a survey of current students and recent alumni, which collected information on the coherence of the major, the suitability of the thesis as a capstone, and the ideas and skills that our majors have found useful in the workforce.
  - an initial re-design and implementation of a new capstone course that has taken effect in 2016-17, along with its prerequisite methodology course (RELI 395: Approaching the Study of Religion).
  - plans for an assessment retreat in May 2017 to review the first iteration of the capstone. The grant will then be extended into 2017-18 to incorporate revisions based on our initial assessment and to conduct another round of evaluation.
- a 2016-2017 re-articulation of department learning goals (see attached), both as an outcome of the grant process and in response to the College's revised Statement of Purpose and newly developed Vision for Student Learning.

While students and department members have been consistently satisfied with their experiences in our program, we continue to look for ways to make improvements and to respond to the changing

landscape of higher education. We consistently develop new courses to augment those that have proven popular and effective, and we look to play an active role in college-wide initiatives.

### **Looking forward**

Please summarize your department's focus for student development and your evaluation methods.

With the extension of our Wabash grant, we will focus on further assessing the revised iterations of RELI 497 (Senior Colloquium) and its prerequisite course, RELI 395 (Approaching the Study of Religion). We will utilize student evaluations as well as informal discussions with this year's students, along with instructor self-assessments shared and discussed departmentally during planned assessment meetings. We plan to continue researching available materials, assignments and effective strategies for these courses. This will include individual work performed by particular course instructors, as well as collective discussions and consultations with colleagues at peer institutions invested in these issues. We then plan to move either this year or next from this focus to related goals, such as scaffolding skill acquisition across the curriculum and developing a rubric for our new learning goals.

### **Achieving departmental goals for students**

Please explain how your departmental curriculum achieves your student learning goals, being sure to include the Capstone. Feel free to attach a curricular map or other supporting documents. Summarize the ways your department provides guidance in the effective use of research and information resources.

We have recently re-articulated our learning goals as mentioned above, which are included for your reference. We have developed parallel sets of objectives, some of which are applicable to all students who take a course in our program, while others are intended for majors. Virtually all of the former objectives are achieved in lower-level courses through readings, assignments, and other features of course content (such as films, special guests, reflective writing, and classroom dialogue). We take an active approach to advising majors in order to achieve depth of focus in the concentration as well as appropriate breadth, and provide guidance regarding engaged learning opportunities along with feasible senior projects. RELI 497 now also includes components dedicated to preparing students for life after college.

### **Your department's role in achieving the college's shared goals for students**

Please explain how your departmental learning goals contribute to the Vision for Student Learning Goals. Feel free to attach a map or other supporting documents.

To be honest, the Religious Studies faculty believe our department plays a vital role in achieving these goals for our students, and in a uniquely comprehensive way. When it comes to our majors, our department appears to meet virtually all of the objectives outlined in the Vision for Student Learning. For instance, the academic enterprise we undertake fulfills all of the anticipated outcomes associated with "rigorous inquiry and informed deliberation," while the subject matter we address across our varied curriculum directly engages questions of values, ethics, and diversity. Our hands-on approach to

advising majors, who develop individual concentrations within our program, combined with reflective assignments in RELI 395 and 497, advance all of the goals associated with supporting the development of “whole persons.” That said, in completing the inventory map (attached), I noted in a second column certain goals that I think are likely achieved by students who enroll in a single course in our department. Given that the majority of our students are non-majors, it may be helpful to note what might be achieved for the larger population we serve in this way.