

Religion Department Assessment 2015

The goals of the major in Religion as outlined in the course catalogue are as follows:

1. To familiarize the student with the biblical writings of the Jewish and Christian traditions;
2. To interpret the nature of religious experience, especially Christian;
3. To introduce the student to the chief persons, works and movements in the history of Christianity; and
4. To show the interrelatedness of religion and culture.

Upon review of these goals, we believe that they accurately reflect the goals of our department. They serve as the basis of the oral exit assessment exercise that we designed for religion majors.

On the basis of these goals, the following oral evaluation instrument was designed for assessing majors. It is a revised version of the written evaluation instrument that was used last year. Last year the baseline assessment was established at the level of a 4 out of a possible 6 point scale. The same baseline assessment figure of 4 out of 6 was used this year. Department members determined to use this instrument within the context of Readings in Theology course, REL 340.

Religion Department Graduating Senior Assessment:

1. Bible. Respond to one of the following prompts (A-C):
 - A. Explain what questions a modern biblical scholar would ask in order to understand a biblical text and why s/he would ask those particular questions.
 - B. Select one New Testament writing, identify its main argument, and explain in detail how it supports that argument.
 - C. Compare and contrast the literary form and theological emphases of two biblical writings.
2. Religious Experience. Choose one of the following questions (A or B) and address it:
 - A. Discuss the way in which at least two thinkers from the areas of the history of religions, the philosophy of religion, the psychology of religion, the sociology of religion, anthropology, gender studies, or theological studies have interpreted religious experience.
 - B. Discuss your own understanding of the nature of religious experience, drawing on the views of other thinkers from the traditions of religious studies and/or theological studies as you present your view.
3. History of Christianity. Choose one of the following questions (A-D) and answer it:
 - A. Define Christology and soteriology. Discuss three specific persons or movements from throughout the history of Christianity who put forward unique or influential understandings of Christology and/or soteriology.
 - B. Discuss major theological innovations of Martin Luther and discuss how he differed from the predominant medieval understanding of Christianity on each point.
 - C. Present one distinctive understanding of Christian identity from four of the following periods: The early church (50-500 AD), the medieval church (500-1500 AD), the early-modern church (1500-1700 AD), the Enlightenment church (1700-1850 AD), and the twentieth-century church.
 - D. Discuss the understanding of God as articulated by any two of the following: Origen, Athanasius, Augustine, John the Scot (Johannes Eriugena), Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, Friedrich Schleiermacher, G.W.F. Hegel, Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Elizabeth Johnson.

4. Religion and culture. Answer one of the following questions (A or B):

A. Choose two of the following movements from the history of Christianity and explain how each movement is related to the cultural circumstances in which it arose: Pauline Christianity, Monasticism, Scholasticism, the Crusades, the Reformation, Transcendentalism, Deism, the Great Awakening, and Fundamentalism.

B. Choose two of the following arenas of the contemporary world in which religion and culture interrelate and discuss how the interrelationship might be understood: religion and science, religion and politics, religion and film, religion and music, religion and dance, religion and literature.

The oral assessment exercise was scored using the following rubric:

Religion Department Graduating Senior Assessment Rubric

Key Criteria Performance Indicators (6=Superior; 5=Excellent; 4=Good; 3=Fair; 2=Poor; 1=Very Poor)

Knowledge of the discipline

Grasping cognitive content
Connecting to other content

	<i>(1 point</i>	<i>2-3-4-5</i>	<i>6 points)</i>
<i>No grasp of disciplinary material and no ability to relate it to other material</i>			<i>Complete grasp of disciplinary material and great ability to relate it to other material</i>

Critical thinking

Subject-matter selections
Conceptual analysis
Development of ideas

	<i>(1 point</i>	<i>2-3-4-5</i>	<i>6 points)</i>
<i>No ability to think critically in selecting material, analyzing concepts, and developing ideas</i>			<i>Demonstrated ability to think critically in selecting material, analyzing concepts and developing ideas</i>

Speaking effectiveness

Grammatical execution
Dialectical progression of narrative
Rhetorical impact (connectedness with reader and persuasive effect of the statement)

	<i>(1 point</i>	<i>2-3-4-5</i>	<i>6 points)</i>
<i>Negligible effectiveness in speaking, with poor grammatical mechanics, weak narrative progression, and little rhetorical impact</i>			<i>Tremendous effectiveness in speaking, with proper grammatical mechanics, strong narrative progression, and great rhetorical impact</i>

Baseline Assessment: a 4 out of a possible 6, or at the 66.7% mark.

Members of the Religion Department (Dan Eppley, George Branch-Trevathan, Jayne Thompson, and Curt Thompson) participated in the interviews. Below are the scores given to each student in the assessment.

Six students were interviewed during finals week. The scored results of the interviews were as follows:

The four goals of the Religion Department	Student 1 (XXXXXX)	Student 2 (XXXXXX)	Student 3 (XXXXXX)	Student 4 (XXXXXX)	Student 5 (XXXXXX)	Student 6 (XXXXXX)	Average Score
<u>Bible</u> Knowledge of the discipline Critical thinking Speaking effectiveness	3.5	3.5	3	4.5	6	5.5	<u>Bible</u> 4.33
<u>Religious Experience</u> Knowledge of the discipline Critical thinking Speaking effectiveness	4.5	4	3.5	6	6	5	<u>Rel. Exper.</u> 4.83
<u>History of Christianity</u> Knowledge of the discipline Critical thinking Speaking effectiveness	3	3	3.5	5	6	4	<u>Hist. of Xnty</u> 4.08
<u>Religion and Culture</u> Knowledge of the discipline Critical thinking Speaking effectiveness	4	4	3.5	6	5.5	4.5	<u>Rel. & Cult.</u> 4.58
Composite score	15	14.5	13.5	21.5	23.5	19	
Average score	17.8 out of 24 We averaged, then, a 4.45 per each of the 4 items.						

What can be learned about the Religion department?

- No single glaring area of weakness was manifested as far as the four departmental goals were concerned. In each of the areas our average score was above the benchmark we set for ourselves (although in two of the areas, half of the students came up a little short of the baseline assessment).
- However, we apparently have to keep in mind the distinction between our baseline assessment and our departmental benchmark. The minimum score that we think indicates that students met the department's learning goals is a 3, which is "fair." Therefore, a score of 12 would be that minimum score (4 x 3). It can be noted that all of the students interviewed and assessed surpassed that minimum goal. We interpret that as meaning that all of them are learning at least the fundamentals of what we want them to learn. We make the grand conclusion from the results of this particular assessment instance that the Religion department is educationally effective. We also note that two of the students interviewed were juniors, and they clearly were at a disadvantage in not having taken as many Religion courses as the other students. The assessment will not be administered to juniors the next time around.

Thoughts about how the interview process worked as a means of departmental assessment?

- Students seemed to enjoy it much more than writing a 5,000 word paper, which was the other option.
- The interview seemed to function as an occasion for feelings of good will about what we have in the Religion department. Professors thanked students for what they had contributed to the work of the department; students thanked professors for providing meaningful learning opportunities for them. Students expressed that they thought they had learned much in their Religion courses and they were glad they were Religion majors. These comments provide no further direct evidence but they are valuable as anecdotal pieces of indirect evidence.

Suggested changes for next year?

- Make the interview process completely independent from the Readings in Theology course.
- Administer the interview only to seniors.
- Give students the full information regarding the interview at the beginning of the fall semester and remind them of this again at the beginning of the spring semester and at mid-term of the spring semester.
- Investigate the possibility of developing this interview into a more elaborate portfolio system in which supporting documents are collected by the student in these four departmental areas. Then during a longer interview that material could be referred to in discussing the four areas. That was in fact an idea that was proposed several years ago.
- There is some confusion in our department, in our College, and in our universe over the distinction between a baseline assignment figure that we have been told does not necessarily have to function as a benchmark and a departmental benchmark that we have determined as a minimally satisfactory mark indicating that fundamentals of what we have been teaching have been learned. To lessen the confusion over this distinction, we will change our baseline assessment figure in next year's iteration of this assessment from a 4 to a 3, which is our benchmark.