Assessment Report

Religious Studies

2021

**Department or Program: REL  
Academic Year of Report: 2020/21  
Department Contact Person for Assessment: Mark Unno**

**Assessment Criteria**

Our assessment examines how effective the Religious Studies major is in the student’s capacity to:

-- (a) Critically engage an argument;

-- (b) Make and support an effective written argument;

-- (c) Interpret social theory or phenomena through the study of religion.

These criteria fit the categories listed in our department's "major map" in facilitating students' capacity to build skills in writing and critical reading; engage with important texts and ideas; and understand one of the most powerful social and cultural forces in human history.

Our pedagogic goals focus on a student's capacity to be able to critically analyze and produce written arguments pertaining to religion in social contexts. As ours is an analytic and writerly field, our approach to assessment is to analyze the final papers of students in our *REL 411, Making Sense of Religion* seminar in the above three categories on a 1-5 point scale (with 5 representing "exceeds expectations" and 1 indicating "clearly below meeting expectations.")

**Assessment Activity**

Direct Measures

A faculty member appointed by the assessment coordinator took 3 papers from REL 411 for the 2020 academic year and did an assessment independent of the grades the students received for the papers or the course. Based on his independent reading of the papers he found the following.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Critically engage an argument | Make and support an effective written argument | Interpret social theory/phenomena through study of religion |
| Student 1 | 4.5 | 4.5 | 4.5 |
| Student 2 | 3.5 | 3 | 3 |
| Student 3 | 4 | 4 | 3.5 |

Overall, based on our assessment, religious studies students are meeting or exceeding expectations in all three categories. They have effectively learned to formulate critical arguments and interpret social theory and phenomena through the study of religion. On the whole, consistent with last year’s assessment, students continued to be strongest in their capacity to engage an argument and formulate an independent thesis, and weakest in consistent execution of their papers.

Indirect Measures

Due to circumstances surrounding the Covid pandemic, no official course evaluations were submitted by students in 2020. However, feedback was solicited by the course instructor midway through the term and at its end. Students reported a high level of satisfaction with the course. For example, one student concluded, “Overall, this course succeeded in being both challenging (not just intellectually, but also in considering the societal and cultural values some of us have been raised with) and also enjoyable.”

**Plans for next year**

We intend to continue working on two ongoing initiatives:

1. We will re-examine how faculty communicate guidelines for evaluating students in general, and in REL 411.
2. We will discuss at our retreat adding two additional aspects of Global Connections Major map to our assessment criteria: becoming an informed and engaged global citizen; and equip yourself with a wide variety of opportunities for employment or further study. Our aim should to be determine a mechanism for assessing these goals.