

**Departmental and Program Assessment
Annual Assessment Plan Report
Religious Studies**

Academic Year: 201302014

Academic Unit: Department of Religious Studies

Chair: Dr. Jay McDaniel

Student Assessment Plan (SAP) – Basic Check-list – If your answers are “yes” a question in this section, no further explanation is necessary.

1. Is there a current assessment plan for your department, program, or general education component? Current implies that this SAP is used by the department. It does not have to be rewritten unless your assessment plan has changed. It should be on the web at <http://www.hendrix.edu/academics/academics.aspx?id=47328>

yes no *If no, provide a timeline that will produce a plan by the end of the next academic year.*

2. Does the current SAP include student learning goals? Departmental/programmatic/general education component student learning goals should be able to stand alone as a list without pages of explanatory commentary.

yes no *If no, provide a timeline that will produce student learning goals by the end of the next academic year.*

3. Does your SAP include a list of assessment data collected yearly? Assessment data lists should be able to stand alone without pages of explanatory commentary. Additionally, collected data should be of enough value to the department that it is read yearly. If not, it is probably not of sufficient use to collect.

yes no *If no, provide a timeline that will produce an assessment data list by the end of the next academic year.*

4. Are student learning goals available to students on the web on the departmental/programmatic page(s)?

yes no *If no, provide a timeline that will produce student access to the learning goals by the end of the next academic year.*

5. Are student learning goals, appropriate for each course, included in the course syllabi in your department or program?

yes no *If no, provide a timeline that will produce student learning goals by the end of the next academic year.*

Yes. However, these are not directly correlated to the departmental learning goals. On some syllabi the learning goals of the college are the ones which are referenced.

6. Does your SAP include direct assessments? “Direct” refers to evaluated student work.

yes no *If no, provide a timeline that will produce a direct student assessment tool by the end of the next academic year.*

Yes, though at present we only compile the senior theses.

7. Describe which indirect assessments in your assessment plan have been collected for the year and which have not. "Indirect" refers to student surveys, interviews, or opinions.

yes no *If no, provide a timeline that will produce an indirect student assessment tool by the end of the next academic year.*

Yes, Dr. Williamson met with our seniors to assess the writing of the senior thesis.

Student Assessment Plan Development - Departments and programs who have a complete and current SAP should consider the next step in SAP development. *This could easily be the annual action item for your department or program (next section #5).*

1. As a next step in SAP development, departments/programs are encouraged begin working on an assessment audit to determine how student learning goals fit across the courses in the major. This could be as complicated as a full grid of student learning goals, or a single learning goal, across the courses in the major. (This has not been required of departments, but it is a recommended next step when the SAP is up to date.)

yes no *If yes, please provide the results in either in prose or as a table.*

We need to identify which RS courses target our departmental learning goals. In the Fall of 2013 we will meet to discuss our array of courses and how best to categorize them under the new system of major requirements we developed in 2012-2014. This will provide a context to consider learning goals anew and see how the RS courses fit within them.

Yearly Assessment Report

What was your planned action item identified in your last report?

We targeted RELI 497 (which presently requires a thesis). We also examined the role RELI 395 (Theories and Research) does or does not play a role in preparation for 497. In the early summer of 2013 we held a two-day retreat to discuss these issues. There was substantive disagreement between members of the department as to what should be the nature of the capstone experience. We were not able to reach agreement on a change so the fulfillment of 497 for the 2012-2013 academic year remains a thesis paper.

We also discussed the possibility of changing our major requirements, and in the fall of 2013, after having this discussion in the spring, we agreed that this was our first priority. We spent the bulk of the year working on this.

What actions did you undertake during 2013-2014 that helped advance the work of the Department and the college as a whole?

1. We met four times during the course of the academic year 2013-2014 in order to develop new requirements for the major. The new requirements were accepted by the faculty and are in the Catalog for 2013-2014. The requirements are as follows:
 - RELI 110 *The World's Religions: An Introduction*
 - A **concentration** of three courses, selected in consultation with the student's departmental advisor, that achieves a deep coverage of a particular religious tradition or set of related issues in the study of religion. The concentration should cohere in such a way as to define and inform the student's particular interest in a tradition, a topic or a method of studying religion. The concentration must include at least two courses in Religious Studies (one of which must be at the 300 level or above) and may include one course in other related disciplines or interdisciplinary programs (e.g., anthropology, art history, classics, English, gender studies, history, philosophy, politics, sociology). The concentration must be finalized in writing by the end of the year prior to graduation and must be approved at that time by both the student's departmental advisor and the chair of the department. Once the requirements for the concentration have been agreed upon in this manner, no changes may be made to the concentration unless, in extraordinary circumstances, such changes are approved

by both the student's advisor and the department chair, in consultation with the department as a whole.

- Four elective courses in Religious Studies demonstrating learning beyond the area of concentration.
 - *RELI 395 Approaching the Study of Religion*
 - An **Odyssey project** in any category demonstrating engaged learning applicable to the student's concentration in the field of religion, selected in consultation with the student's departmental advisor.
 - A **senior capstone experience** to be undertaken in *RELI 497 Senior Colloquium*.
 - The chair of the department, in consultation with the student's advisor, will determine how transfer credits and courses taken during study abroad will be applied toward departmental requirements.
2. The new major requirements offer (1) stronger preparation for writing a thesis/capstone, (2) a way of integrating the Odyssey initiative into our major, and (3) a way that the Department of Religious Studies can contribute to holistic advising. The revised requirements also (4) provide a depth component that has been lacking among our majors because the previous requirements emphasized breadth and (5) gives more coherence to what each student does rather than simply take a variegated selection of courses. Finally, the requirements (6) better represent the array of subjects in the field of religious studies than were previously represented in the Catalog and (7) allow students to shape their own program to meet specific interests/goals.
 3. We changed the title of RELI 395 from Research and Methods to Approaching the Study of Religion. We considered the possibility of changing the level to 295.
 4. We decided to offer Wesley and Methodism again in the spring of 2013-2014.
 5. We discussed the possibility and advantages of a "scaffolding" approach to writing, beginning with 200 level courses, in which professors of Religious Studies would agree to certain standard "writing" requirements for courses.
 6. We sponsored a workshop on Digital Storytelling for Religious Studies faculty and others interested, featuring two professionals on the Hendrix campus.
 7. We decided not to continue the Hendrix Undergraduate Conference in Religious Studies.
 8. Collectively we taught 446 students, including Journeys and Explorations.
 9. Collectively we taught 375 students in Religious Studies courses along, excluding Journeys and Exploration.
 10. Four of our five members taught Journeys, a course required of all first year students; three of our five members will teach TEC courses.
 11. We provided opportunities for five religious students to publish the results of their work on an online website developed by Dr. McDaniel.
 12. We developed our skills in digital humanities by experimenting with Skyping speakers from afar: Ecuador and China, for example.
 13. We sponsored various Odyssey experiences for students.
 14. We helped organize and sponsor six Friday Afternoon Discussions dealing with matters related to religion and religious studies.
 15. We brought in two speakers in Religious Studies under the auspices of the Steel Center and the Department of Religion: Rabbi Bradley Artson and Rabbi Michael Broyde.
 16. We took three students to regional meetings of the Society for Biblical Studies/American Academy of Religion.

Briefly summarize the topics discussed in your annual assessment meeting. (If you have not met this year, why not and when do you plan to meet?)

We will meet in August of 2014. Our tasks at the assessment meeting in August of 2014 will be:

1. We plan to revisit learning goals, seeing if and how our courses meet them.

2. We plan to consider what the senior thesis should entail and if, in fact, we want to continue with a thesis.
3. We plan to consider our list of courses, as articulated in the catalog, and see if we want to organize them in a thematic way.
4. We plan to consider scaffolding approaches to writing requirements for Religious Studies courses.

These four aims are the next step for us, after having developed the new major.