

Detailed Assessment Report
As of: 10/04/2012 09:30 AM EST
2011-2012 Religion BA

Mission / Purpose

The purpose of the religion major is to develop students' understanding of how the world's religious traditions have grappled with central problems facing humanity: the purpose of our existence, the nature of the divine, how human beings ought to behave towards one another, and why bad things happen to good people (theodicy). We seek to empower students to acquire basic knowledge of world religions, as well as the skills needed in the academic study of religion. The knowledge and skills acquired through the major in Religion may broaden students' career options as well as inculcating a thoughtful way of life. The major constitutes an expression of the college and university mission statements to enhance the quality of life through scholarship and teaching in the humanities. It seeks to meet the concern expressed in the departmental mission statement for helping students understand ideas and practices that have shaped our world and involving them in critical thinking about their own fundamental beliefs and values.

Student Learning Outcomes/Objectives, with Any Associations and Related Measures, Targets, Findings, and Action Plans

SLO 1: Understand Western religions

Students will demonstrate their understanding of major concepts, figures, and historical developments in the religions that emerged in the Middle East (Judaism, Christianity and Islam).

Related Measures:

M 1: Paper (Western Religions)

One paper on a major concept, figure, or historical development in the religions that emerged in the Middle East (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) in a course oriented primarily toward Abrahamic religiosity will be described in an instructor's narrative evaluation. The paper will be assessed in accordance with a departmental paper rubric that includes the following categories: articulating an interesting thesis, arguing convincingly for the thesis, anticipating and responding to potential objections, displaying a knowledge of existing literature on the issue, using proper citation techniques, and showing clear and effective writing style.

Source of Evidence: Written assignment(s), usually scored by a rubric

Target:

Ninety percent of graduates will achieve a score of 4 or better on a five-point departmental rubric. Thirty percent of graduates will receive a five.

Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Not Met

40% (4/10) of graduates achieved a score of 4 or better on a five point departmental rubric. 20% (2/10) of graduates achieved a score of 5.

Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):

For full information, see the *Details of Action Plans* section of this report.

Understand Western Religions

Established in Cycle: 2010-2011

Targets where ninety percent of graduates will achieve a score of 4 or better on a five-point departmental rubric and thirty per...

emphasize training in Western religions

Established in Cycle: 2011-2012

There are several reasons why our targets were not met. First, several students undertook course work which was required by the...

M 2:Exit survey (Western Religions)

Seventy-five percent of graduates will say on a survey that their understanding of Western religions is adequate or better (on a scale including poor, marginal, adequate, good and excellent.)

Target:

Seventy-five percent of graduates will say on a survey that their understanding of major concepts, figures, and historical developments in Western religions is good or excellent. Ninety percent will say that their understanding of major concepts, figures, and historical developments in Western religions is adequate or better (on a scale including poor, marginal, adequate, good and excellent.)

Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met

80% (8/10) of graduates said their understanding of major concepts, figures, and historical developments in Western religions is good or excellent. 100% (10/10) said that their understanding of major concepts, figures, and historical developments in Western religions is adequate or better.

Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):

For full information, see the *Details of Action Plans* section of this report.

Student evaluations of education in Western religions

Established in Cycle: 2010-2011

Targets where seventy-five percent of graduates will say on a survey that their understanding of major concepts, figures, and hi...

SLO 2:Understand Eastern religions

Students will demonstrate their understanding of major concepts, figures, and historical developments in the religions that emerged in South and East Asia (Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism).

Related Measures:

M 3:Paper (Eastern Religions)

One paper on a major concept, figure, or historical development in the religions of South and East Asia (Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism) from a course oriented primarily toward Asian religiosity will be described in an instructor's narrative evaluation. Papers will be assessed in accordance with a departmental paper rubric. The departmental paper rubric assesses papers in the following categories: articulating an interesting thesis, arguing convincingly for the thesis, anticipating and responding to potential objections, displaying a knowledge of existing literature on the issue, using proper citation techniques, and showing clear and effective writing style.

Source of Evidence: Written assignment(s), usually scored by a rubric

Target:

Ninety percent of graduates will achieve a score of 4 or better on a five-point departmental rubric. Thirty percent of graduates will receive a five.

Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met

100% (8/8) scored 4 or better. 88% (7/8) scored a 5.

Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):

For full information, see the *Details of Action Plans* section of this report.

Understanding Eastern Religions - Instructor evaluations

Established in Cycle: 2010-2011

Targets where ninety percent of graduates will achieve a score of 4 or better on a five-point departmental rubric and thirty per...

M 4:Exit Survey (Eastern Religions)

Seventy-five percent of graduates will say on a survey that their understanding of Eastern religions is adequate or better (on a scale including poor, marginal, adequate, good and excellent.)

Source of Evidence: Student course evaluations on learning gains made

Target:

Seventy-five percent of graduates will say on a survey that their understanding of major concepts, figures, and historical developments in Eastern religions is good or excellent. Ninety percent will say that their understanding of major concepts, figures, and historical developments in Eastern religions is adequate or better (on a scale including poor, marginal, adequate, good and excellent.)

Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met

100% (8/8) of graduates said that their understanding of major concepts, figures, and historical developments in Eastern religions is adequate or better. 75 % (6/8) of graduates said that their understanding of major concepts, figures, and historical developments in Eastern religions is good or excellent.

Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):

For full information, see the *Details of Action Plans* section of this report.

Understanding Eastern Religions - Student evaluations

Established in Cycle: 2010-2011

Targets where seventy-five percent of graduates will say on a survey that their understanding of major concepts, figures, and hi...

SLO 3:Understand philosophical reflection on religion

Students will demonstrate their understanding of philosophical reflection on religion.

Related Measures:

M 5:Paper (Philosophical Reflection)

One paper from PHI 372 in which a student explains and analyzes a philosophical view on religion and defends his or her own position in relation to the view will be described in an instructor's narrative evaluation. Papers will be assessed in accordance with a departmental paper rubric. The departmental paper rubric assesses papers in the following categories: articulating an interesting thesis, arguing convincingly for the thesis, anticipating and responding to potential objections, displaying a knowledge of existing literature on the issue, using proper citation techniques, and showing clear and effective writing style.

Source of Evidence: Written assignment(s), usually scored by a rubric

Target:

Ninety percent of graduates will achieve a score of 4 or better on a five-point departmental rubric. Thirty percent of graduates will receive a five.

Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Not Met

4/7 (57%) of graduates achieved a score of 4 or better on a five-point departmental rubric. 2/7 (29%) of graduates received a five.

Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):

For full information, see the *Details of Action Plans* section of this report.

improve philosophical reflection

Established in Cycle: 2011-2012

Our direct measure targets for philosophical reflection on religion were not met. There are a few possible reasons for this. F...

M 6:Exit Survey (Philosophical Reflection)

Seventy-five percent of graduates will say on a survey that their understanding of philosophical thought on religion is adequate or better (on a scale including poor, marginal, adequate, good and excellent.)

Source of Evidence: Student course evaluations on learning gains made

Target:

Seventy-five percent of graduates will say on a survey that their understanding of philosophical thought on religion is good or excellent. Ninety percent will say that their understanding of philosophical thought on religion is adequate or better (on a scale including poor, marginal, adequate, good and excellent.)

Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met

100% (8/8) of graduates said that their understanding of philosophical thought on religion is adequate or better. 75 % (6/8) of graduates said that their understanding of philosophical thought on religion is good or excellent.

Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):

For full information, see the *Details of Action Plans* section of this report.

Philosophical Reflection on Religion - Student evaluations

Established in Cycle: 2010-2011

Targets where seventy-five percent of graduates will say on a survey that their understanding of philosophical thought on religi...

SLO 4:Writing effectively

Students will demonstrate their ability to write effectively about major concepts, figures, and historical developments in the world's religious traditions and/or in the academic study of religion.

Related Measures:

M 7:Capstone Course Paper

A capstone course paper (for REL 480), exhibiting analytical and argumentative skills, will be described in an instructor's narrative evaluation. Papers will be assessed in accordance with the capstone paper rubric. The capstone paper rubric assesses papers in the following categories: articulating a clear and interesting thesis, giving understandable explanations of ideas in religious studies, using clear and helpful examples, showing awareness and understanding of relevant primary sources and secondary literature, accurately and charitably representing the views of others, having a well-conceived and understandable organizational scheme, offering effective arguments for the thesis, anticipating and responding effectively to potential objections, having a clear and cogent writing style, using proper citation techniques, and observing grammatical and spelling rules.

Source of Evidence: Written assignment(s), usually scored by a rubric

Target:

90% of graduates will attain a 4 or better on a five-point capstone paper rubric. 30% of students will attain a 5.

Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met

100% (8/8) achieved a score of at least 4. 75% (6/8) achieved a score of 5.

M 8:Exit Survey (Capstone Writing)

Seventy-five percent of graduates will say on a survey that their writing skills are good or excellent. Ninety percent will say that their writing skills are adequate or better (on a scale including poor, marginal, adequate, good, and excellent.) Eighty percent will say that their major has improved their writing skills.

Source of Evidence: Student course evaluations on learning gains made

Target:

75% of graduates will say on a survey that their writing skills are good or excellent, 90% will say that their writing skills are adequate or better (on a scale including poor, marginal, adequate, good, and excellent.) Eighty percent will say that their major has improved their writing skills.

Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met

75% (6/8) of graduates said that their writing skills are good or excellent. 100% (8/8) of graduates said that their writing skills are adequate or better. 100% (8/8) of graduates said that their major has improved their writing skills.

SLO 5:Speaking effectively

Students will demonstrate their ability to deliver an effective oral presentation on major concepts, figures, and historical developments in the world's religious traditions and/or in the academic study of religion.

Related Measures:

M 9:Capstone Presentation

Students will deliver a major presentation in their capstone class (REL 432 or 447). Presentations will be assessed in accordance with a five-point departmental presentation rubric that includes the following elements: gives an interesting description of issues in religious studies, offers explanations appropriate to an undergraduate audience, uses clear and helpful examples, has clear and effective organization, has effective presentation style, uses well-designed visual aids, involves students in discussion, responds effectively to audience questions of comments.

Source of Evidence: Presentation, either individual or group

Target:

Seventy percent of students will score a 4 or better on a 5 point rubric.

Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met

100% (8/8) scored a 4 or better.

M 10:Exit Survey (Capstone Oral Speaking)

Seventy-five percent of graduates will say on a survey that their oral presentation skills are good or excellent. Ninety percent will say that their oral presentation skills are adequate or better (on a scale including poor, marginal, adequate, good, and excellent.) Eighty percent will say that their major has improved their oral presentation skills.

Source of Evidence: Student course evaluations on learning gains made

Target:

75% of graduates will say on a survey that their oral presentation skills are good or excellent, 90% will say that their oral presentation skills are adequate or better (on a scale including poor, marginal, adequate, good, and excellent.) Eighty percent will say that their major has improved their oral presentation skills.

Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met

88% (7/8) of graduates said that their oral presentation skills are good or excellent. 100% (8/8) said that their major has improved their oral presentation skills.

Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):

For full information, see the *Details of Action Plans* section of this report.

Capstone Oral Speaking - Student evaluations

Established in Cycle: 2010-2011

Targets where 75% of graduates will say on a survey that their oral presentation skills are good or excellent, 90% will say that...

Details of Action Plans for This Cycle (by Established cycle, then alpha)

Capstone Oral Speaking - Student evaluations

Targets where 75% of graduates will say on a survey that their oral presentation skills are good or excellent, 90% will say that their oral presentation skills are adequate or better (on a scale including poor, marginal, adequate, good, and excellent), and eighty percent will say that their major has improved their oral presentation skills were partially met. Perhaps the shortcoming arises simply from a small sample size. Nonetheless faculty in Religion will make sustained efforts to improve students' oral presentation skills.

Established in Cycle: 2010-2011

Implementation Status: Finished

Priority: High

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):

Measure: Exit Survey (Capstone Oral Speaking) | **Outcome/Objective:** Speaking effectively

Implementation Description: From the introductory course, REL 131 Comparative Religion, to the capstone course REL 480, faculty in Religion will highlight oral speaking skills and create student assignments designed to improve students' oral speaking skills.

Responsible Person/Group: All faculty who teach courses for Religion credit.

Additional Resources Requested: None.

Philosophical Reflection on Religion - Student evaluations

Targets where seventy-five percent of graduates will say on a survey that their understanding of philosophical thought on religion is good or excellent and ninety percent will say that their understanding of philosophical thought on religion is adequate or better were partially met. Perhaps the shortcoming arises simply from a small sample size. Nonetheless faculty in Religion will make sustained efforts to improve students' understanding.

Established in Cycle: 2010-2011

Implementation Status: Finished

Priority: High

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):

Measure: Exit Survey (Philosophical Reflection) | **Outcome/Objective:** Understand philosophical reflection on religion

Implementation Description: From the introductory course, REL 131 Comparative Religion, to the capstone course REL 480, faculty in Religion will highlight concepts in philosophical reflection regarding religion and create student assignments designed to improve students' philosophical reflection regarding religion.

Responsible Person/Group: All faculty who teach courses for Religion credit.

Additional Resources Requested: None.

Student evaluations of education in Western religions

Targets where seventy-five percent of graduates will say on a survey that their understanding of major concepts, figures, and historical developments in Western religions is good or excellent and ninety percent will say that their understanding of major concepts, figures, and historical developments in Western religions is

adequate or better (on a scale including poor, marginal, adequate, good and excellent) were partially met. Perhaps the shortcoming arises simply from a small sample size. Nonetheless faculty in Religion will make sustained efforts to improve students' understanding.

Established in Cycle: 2010-2011

Implementation Status: Finished

Priority: High

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):

Measure: Exit survey (Western Religions) | **Outcome/Objective:** Understand Western religions

Implementation Description: From the introductory course, REL 131 Comparative Religion, to the capstone course REL 480, faculty in Religion will highlight concepts in the study of Western religions and create student assignments designed to improve students' understandings of Western religions.

Responsible Person/Group: All faculty teaching courses for credit in Religion.

Additional Resources Requested: None.

Understand Western Religions

Targets where ninety percent of graduates will achieve a score of 4 or better on a five-point departmental rubric and thirty percent of graduates will receive a five. Perhaps the shortcoming arises simply from a small sample size. Nonetheless faculty in Religion will make sustained efforts to improve students' understanding of Western religions.

Established in Cycle: 2010-2011

Implementation Status: Finished

Priority: High

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):

Measure: Paper (Western Religions) | **Outcome/Objective:** Understand Western religions

Implementation Description: From the introductory course, REL 131 Comparative Religion, to the capstone course REL 480, faculty in Religion will highlight concepts in the study of Western religions and create student assignments designed to improve students' understandings of Western religions.

Responsible Person/Group: All faculty teaching courses for Religion credit.

Additional Resources Requested: none.

Understanding Eastern Religions - Instructor evaluations

Targets where ninety percent of graduates will achieve a score of 4 or better on a five-point departmental rubric and thirty percent of graduates will receive a five were partially met. Perhaps the shortcoming arises simply from a small sample size. Nonetheless faculty in Religion will make sustained efforts to improve students' understanding.

Established in Cycle: 2010-2011

Implementation Status: Finished

Priority: High

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):

Measure: Paper (Eastern Religions) | **Outcome/Objective:** Understand Eastern religions

Implementation Description: From the introductory course, REL 131 Comparative Religion, to the capstone course REL 480, faculty in Religion will highlight concepts in the study of Eastern religions and create student assignments designed to improve students' understandings of Eastern religions.

Responsible Person/Group: All faculty who teach courses for Religion credit.

Additional Resources Requested: None.

Understanding Eastern Religions - Student evaluations

Targets where seventy-five percent of graduates will say on a survey that their understanding of major concepts, figures, and historical developments in Eastern religions is good or excellent and ninety percent will say that their understanding of major concepts, figures, and historical developments in Eastern religions is adequate or better were partially met. Perhaps the shortcoming arises simply from a small sample size. Nonetheless faculty in Religion will make sustained efforts to improve students' understanding.

Established in Cycle: 2010-2011

Implementation Status: Finished

Priority: High

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):

Measure: Exit Survey (Eastern Religions) | **Outcome/Objective:** Understand Eastern religions

Implementation Description: From the introductory course, REL 131 Comparative Religion, to the capstone course REL 480, faculty in Religion will highlight concepts in the study of Eastern religions and create student assignments designed to improve students' understandings of Eastern religions.

Responsible Person/Group: All faculty who teach courses for Religion credit.

Additional Resources Requested: None.

emphasize training in Western religions

There are several reasons why our targets were not met. First, several students undertook course work which was required by the major yet unfamiliar to them. Second, our sample size was small. Third, perhaps faculty need to emphasize training in Western religions more. Going forward the program in Religion will especially emphasize training in important figures, concepts, and historical moments in the study of Western religions.

Established in Cycle: 2011-2012

Implementation Status: In-Progress

Priority: High

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):

Measure: Paper (Western Religions) | **Outcome/Objective:** Understand Western religions

Implementation Description: From the beginning course, REL 131, to the Capstone course, REL 480, all faculty in Religion will highlight and stress the study of important figures, concepts, and historical moments in Western religions.

Responsible Person/Group: All faculty teaching courses for Religion credit.

Additional Resources Requested: None.

improve philosophical reflection

Our direct measure targets for philosophical reflection on religion were not met. There are a few possible reasons for this. First, some students do not have much philosophical training when they enter PHI 372. Second, our sample sizes are small. Third, perhaps faculty members do not stress philosophical reflection enough in pedagogy. In response, our new degree plan requires Religion majors to take Introduction to Philosophy, giving them greater experience with philosophy. Also faculty members will stress the development of philosophical reflection in the classroom and in assignments.

Established in Cycle: 2011-2012

Implementation Status: In-Progress

Priority: High

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):

Measure: Paper (Philosophical Reflection) | **Outcome/Objective:** Understand philosophical reflection on religion

Implementation Description: Religion majors will be required to take Introduction to Philosophy to increase their training in philosophy. As well, faculty members will be urged to stress philosophical reflection in the classroom and in assignments.

Responsible Person/Group: All faculty members who teach courses for Religion credit.

Additional Resources Requested: none.

Analysis Questions and Analysis Answers

What specifically did your assessments show regarding proven strengths or progress you made on outcomes/objectives?

The Religion program appears to have improved in a number of areas, although our small sample sizes discourage conclusions which are too strong.

First, our target for the indirect measure for Outcome/Objective 1, Understanding Western Religions, was met, unlike previously. This would appear to signal greater student satisfaction with learning outcomes regarding the study of Western religions.

Further, both direct and indirect targets for measuring Outcome/Objective 2, Understanding Eastern Religions, were met, whereas last year they both had gone partially met. This would appear to signal greater faculty and student satisfaction with learning outcomes regarding the study of Eastern religions.

Moreover, our target for the indirect measure for Outcome/Objective 5, Speaking Effectively, was met, unlike previously. This would appear to indicate greater student satisfaction with learning outcomes regarding the ability to speak effectively.

What specifically did your assessments show regarding any outcomes/objectives that will require continued attention?

The target for the direct measure for Outcome/Objective 1, Understanding Western Religions, has been unmet for two years in a row, although the statistical margins both years were narrow. In the last year faculty members have been encouraged to emphasize this as an area of learning. Of interest is the fact that the indirect measure target regarding student satisfaction was met this year, indicating a gap between faculty and student evaluations. As long as a gap remains between faculty evaluation of student performance and student evaluation of learning experiences regarding the study of Western religions, faculty members will be encouraged to remain aware of this gap and to emphasize student learning in this area.

The target for the direct measure for Outcome/Objective 3, Understanding Philosophical Reflection on Religion, went unmet. The sample size on this issue is small ($n=7$ this year, $n=0$ last year), and the indirect measure target regarding student satisfaction was met. Nonetheless Religion faculty members will be encouraged to remain aware that this target was not met and to emphasize student learning in this area. A change to the Religion major degree plan which requires the course on Introduction to Philosophy should help here, as perhaps previously too many students entered the more advanced 300-level Philosophy of Religion course without adequate prior preparation.

Annual Report Section Responses

Program Summary

The still-young program in Religion made several advances this year in terms of pedagogical success. Several prior weaknesses, as indicated by both direct and indirect measures, appear to have been ameliorated. Perhaps this is due to the fact that newer faculty members (2 of the 3 tenure-line faculty members in the program were hired in the last five years) are finding their stride in the classroom. Especially encouraging here is the fact that student evaluations of satisfaction in Religion classes appear to be overwhelmingly positive. In everyday conversations student complaints about the program are not about faculty members and their pedagogy. In

fact, our faculty members appear to be exemplary teachers. In the last 18 months Dr. Amy Slagle received the Junior Faculty Excellence in Teaching Award from the College of Arts and Letters and Dr. Daniel Capper received Honors College Professor of the Month as well as College of Arts and Letters Excellence in Teaching awards. Instead student complaints center around a limited array of course subjects. As students see it, the best way that the program in religion can improve is to add a wider variety of classes. However, with current faculty resources this expansion is difficult, although we will be adding new courses in "Sufism" and "Religion and the Literary Imagination" next year. What is most needed from the standpoint of both faculty members and students is an instructor with a specialty in Judaic studies. Given that Judaism is foundational for all later developments in Western religions, a scholar of Judaism could both helpfully expand our course offerings as well as respond to deficiencies in training in Western religions.

Continuous Improvement Initiatives

We have no special continuous improvement initiatives which have not already been mentioned: emphasizing the study of Western religions, emphasizing understanding of philosophical reflection on religion, and adding Introduction to Philosophy as a degree requirement, rather than just an option, for Religion majors.

Closing the Loop

Previously the Religion program had unmet or partially met targets involving direct and indirect measures of Outcome/Objective 1, Understanding Western Religions, as well as Outcome/Objective 2, Understanding Eastern Religions. We also had partially met targets involving indirect measures of Outcome/Objective 3, Understanding Philosophical Reflection on Religion, in addition to Outcome/Objective 5, Capstone Oral Speaking. We initiated action plans regarding all of these weaknesses.

Our action plans mostly appear to have met with success. Almost every previous unmet or partially met target was met this year. While we continue to be aware of prior weaknesses so that we can turn past weaknesses into future strengths, the overall improvement is gratifying.

Where we continue to need work is with meeting the direct measure target for Outcome/Objective 1, Understanding Western Religions. Faculty members whose expertise fall under this objective are still relatively new at USM and it is hoped that efforts here will improve as they become seasoned. As well, since all faculty members engage topics in Western religions at some point or another, all faculty members in the program will be encouraged to be aware of this deficiency and to rectify it with pedagogical attention and emphasis.