

DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES
ASSESSMENT REPORT
DUE DATE: JULY 1, 2016

1. Identifying Information

Name of Program: Theology & Religious Studies
Type of Program (Major, Minor)
College of Arts and Sciences (Humanities)

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2. Mission Statement

“Religion is one of the most powerful social forces shaping the world of the 21st century. We believe that an understanding of religious traditions, a passion for social justice, and sensitivity for cultural difference help students navigate our religiously complex world. The Department of Theology and Religious Studies shares the Jesuit mission of the University of San Francisco by examining both human experience of the divine and the transmission of that experience through religious traditions, doctrines, and rituals, emphasizing the Catholic tradition. Welcoming religious diversity as a challenge, the Department exposes students to the wisdom and values of world religious traditions.”

This mission statement was revised in the last year.

3. Program Goals:

Our three program goals are:

- Analysis of the world’s religious and theological traditions.
- Knowledge of the development of religious traditions and of subdivisions within them, including the Catholic tradition and its engagement with other religious traditions.
- Knowledge of academic methods and practices characteristic of the study of theology and/or religion, including the different contributions of textual, historical, social, and interdisciplinary studies.

These program goals were revisited in the last year.

4. Program Learning Outcomes for Majors:

Our four learning outcomes are:

1. *Human Dimensions of Religion, Theology and Spirituality* - Students will articulate how religion, theology, and spirituality underlie and correlate with a broad range of human experience.
2. *Religious Diversity* - Students are able to articulate the particularities of various faith traditions, including creedal vision, moral teachings, historical context, social expression, and key rites and symbols, as encouraged by Vatican II's stance on the Catholic Church's relationship with other faiths.
3. *Social Justice* - Students demonstrate how religious traditions work for social justice and the good of the entire human family as well as the environment that sustains it.
4. *Theory & Methods of the Study of Religion* – Students will demonstrate knowledge of academic methods and practices characteristic of the study of theology and/or religion, including the different contributions of textual, historical, social, and interdisciplinary studies.

These PLOs were revised this year.

5. Brief Summary of Most Recent Assessment Plan

Our most recent assessment plan submitted in November 2015 revised the Mission Statement, Program Goals and Program Learning Outcomes. It highlighted the particular challenges that our department faces, given the very small number of majors as well as the absence of courses designed for majors only. It outlined a plan of action for assessing PLO #2 (Religious Diversity).

6. Academic Program Review

The most recent Academic Program Review's External Reviewer visit took place in 2011.

7. Methods

We decided to evaluate PLO #2 (Religious Diversity) using direct written methods and to put one "embedded question" to the students in as many courses as possible in Spring 2016. The question, which was embedded in final exams and other written work (class tests), was as follows:

"Articulate how the specifics of this course illustrate diversity in religious traditions, ideas and practices ... "

We did not, at this time, utilize any indirect methods, apart from engaging faculty in discussion on the question of PLO #2 during the penultimate department meeting of the academic year 2015-16.

8. Results

The results are surprising. None of our courses *directly* address the PLO of religious diversity. While our courses treat the particularities of various religious traditions including Buddhism,

Catholicism, Islam and Judaism, no course directly puts a major religious tradition in dialog with another, as regards creedal vision, moral teachings, historical context, social expression, or key rites and symbols.

Nonetheless, the appreciation of religious diversity that we expect of students arises *indirectly* in four different ways, as reported in the direct data we collected:

- (i) The study of particular religious traditions indirectly helps appreciation of religious diversity, e.g. students remarked on the fact that while one course concentrated on presenting the basics of Catholicism, it also highlighted the key specificities that set the Christian religion apart from other major faith traditions.
- (ii) In addition, these courses on the particular traditions lead to an appreciation of *internal* religious diversity, e.g. Catholicism in contrast to other Christian denominations, the variety of spiritual identities and narratives within Judaism, the different approaches to Buddhism and the traditions internal to Islam.
- (iii) Moreover, courses focusing on human experience, especially on the role of forgiveness in inter-communal conflict (e.g. Israel-Palestine) also provide the opportunity for students to deepen awareness of the complexity of religious identities and traditions.
- (iv) Finally, the religious diversity of the student body itself can give rise to an appreciation of religious diversity, especially in courses for which class discussion is an important component: i.e. one student reported that class discussion was shared by a mixture of students from different backgrounds and perspectives, making the lens through which topics were examined as diverse as the situations themselves.

In sum, while direct comparison of disparate religious traditions is conspicuously absent from our curriculum, we are confident that PLO#2 is being met, albeit indirectly for the most part.

Finally, our sole indirect assessment of this PLO was a faculty meeting held in April 2016. At this meeting, the disparity between our course offerings (addressing religious particularities) and our PLO #2 (expecting an appreciation of religious generalities and comparisons) came to light in discussion. The direct and indirect methods of assessment of this PLO, therefore, both converge on the same outcome.

9. Closing the Loop

Given that this report relies on data taken from final exams and other materials administered late in the academic year (2015-16), the department will have to meet early next academic year (2016-7) to discuss the implications of our findings, and devise an effective remediation plan.

The appreciation of religious diversity is a PLO that is central to any Theology and Religious Studies Department. It is simply not an option to weaken or delete it. Therefore, there are two paths of action open to us at this point, which are of course not mutually exclusive:

(i) *Revision of course content*: In order to better situate particular religious traditions within the context of world religions, the content of courses could be revised somewhat to highlight the importance of this PLO. This would necessitate placing PLO #2 directly as a course outcome in our courses on particular religious traditions, and/or introducing new course materials that would allow for direct assessment, if these materials are not already present.

(ii) *Curriculum review & Proposal of new courses*: A more direct approach is to introduce new courses that directly address comparative religion and religious diversity, which could provide an opportunity for collaboration across the faculty.