

**Theology and Religious Studies  
Major and Minor  
2024-2025 Assessment Report**

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**Mission Statement (no changes):<sup>1</sup>**

The Department of Theology & Religious Studies (hereafter THRS) embodies the University of San Francisco's (hereafter USF) mission to "promote learning in the Jesuit Catholic tradition"; offers students "the knowledge and skills needed to succeed as persons and professionals, and the values and sensitivity to be [people] for others"; "distinguish[es] itself as a diverse, socially responsible learning community of high quality scholarship and academic rigor sustained by a faith that does justice"; and "draw[s] from the cultural, intellectual, and economic resources of the San Francisco Bay Area and its location on the Pacific Rim to enrich and strengthen its educational programs."

Religion is one of the most powerful social forces in the world. An understanding of religious traditions helps students navigate the twenty-first-century's complexities. THRS programs critically and systematically explore religious experiences and cultural differences, assisting students in becoming familiar with major religious traditions, values, and symbols. Our faculty encourage students to appreciate the role of religion in public and private life, developing knowledge about human dignity and human rights, freedom, responsibility, and social justice. In developing an awareness of the relationship between belief and justice, students also engage in an exploration in the religious dimensions of their own lives.

**Program Learning Outcomes for the Major and Minor (no changes):**

1) **Human Dimensions of Religion, Theology and Spirituality:** Students articulate how religion, theology, and spirituality underlie and correlate with a broad range of human experience.

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<sup>1</sup> No changes have been made in 2023-2024. Department of Theology & Religious Studies, University of San Francisco, "Academic Program Review: Department Self Study 2018" (January 31, 2018).

2) **Religious Diversity:** Students will articulate the particularities of various faith traditions (including creedal vision, moral teachings, historical context, social expression, and key rites and symbols) in the context of the plurality of world religious traditions, as encouraged by Vatican II's stance on the Catholic Church's relationship with other faiths.

3) **Social Justice:** Students will articulate 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 employ 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.

### **Curricular Map (no changes):**

### **Assessment Schedule:**

In 2017-2018, we conducted our last APR. That year we assessed PLO #3. In 2018-19, we assessed PLO #4. In 2019-20, we did the alternative assessment for Covid teaching. In 2020-2021, we assessed PLO #1. In 2021-2022 we did a year of reflection and analysis of our syllabi's presentation of core and department learning outcomes. And in 2022-2023, we assessed PLO #2, thus "closing the loop" and assessing all four of our PLOs. Last year we assessed PLO #1.

This year, our assessment is indirect with a quantitative method. We asked CIPE, the statistics office at USF, to provide the grading distribution for full-time and part-time faculty from the past five academic years and to assess what percentage of grades given are A's and whether full- or part-time faculty gave higher grades.

Last year's assessment noted that we planned to review the work of our majors and minors in the Methods and Theories course. But this year we decided not to do this because we wanted to respond to an issue raised at Arts Council:

In the fall 2025, at Arts Council, the chair of another department raised the issue of grade inflation, and it was discussed at two Arts Council meetings. The issue was based on the observation of the final grades of several courses across several departments, many professors give all A's or mostly A's to their students, particularly in core classes, with the negative consequence that students are unprepared for upper-division courses. Faculty raised related concerns, such as: feeling strong pressure from students to give high grades, data showing that part-time faculty give particularly high grades (probably due to their contracts being renewed each year and how this depends largely on their student evaluations). Articles were shared that discussed how grade inflation is a problem nationwide, particularly:

- 1) <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/06/us/harvard-students-absenteeism.html>
- 2) <https://www.chronicle.com/article/grading-is-broken?sra=true>

The members of the Arts Council meetings, the directors and chairs decided to ask their departments' faculties in a non-binding way to study this using data from CIPE to try to determine if there is a problem with grade inflation.

At the THRS department meeting in December of 2025, the full-time faculty discussed this issue and there was consensus for answering two questions:

- 1) What percent of our students receive A's?
- 2) Do part-time or full-time faculty in general give higher grades?

### Assessment Methodology and Rubrics:

Our program assistant requested the data on the THRS department's grading from CIPE and provided this to the chair, Mark Miller, who met with Tsering Wangchuck to discuss this. The data was also shared with the entire department, and it was discussed in the May 2026 department meeting.

Here is the data, with full-time faculty's lines highlighted for easy viewing:

Academic Year	Faculty Type	# Graded	# of A's	# of B's	# of C's	# of Ds	# of Fs	% of A's	% of B's	% of C's	% of D's	% of F's	Average GPA
2020-21	Full Time	443	340	58	10	5	30	76.75	13.09	2.26	1.13	6.77	3.53
2020-21	Part Time	678	516	81	48	5	28	76.11	11.95	7.08	0.74	4.13	3.51
2021-22	Full Time	573	407	88	24	8	46	71.03	15.36	4.19	1.40	8.03	3.42
2021-22	Part Time	661	535	75	28	8	15	80.94	11.35	4.24	1.21	2.27	3.57
2022-23	Full Time	441	332	61	19	3	26	75.28	13.83	4.31	0.68	5.90	3.49
2022-23	Part Time	805	611	117	39	8	30	75.90	14.53	4.84	0.99	3.73	3.54
2023-24	Full Time	536	411	75	13	6	31	76.68	13.99	2.43	1.12	5.78	3.52
2023-24	Part Time	661	541	70	31	3	16	81.85	10.59	4.69	0.45	2.42	3.59
2024-25	Full Time	350	273	45	8	2	22	78	12.86	2.29	0.57	6.29	3.56
2024-25	Part Time	739	635	62	25	1	16	85.93	8.39	3.38	0.14	2.17	3.68
2025-26	Full Time	191	152	30	6	0	3	79.58	15.71	3.14	0	1.57	3.62
2025-26	Part Time	265	243	16	3	1	2	91.70	6.04	1.13	0.38	0.75	3.78

The reviewers made the following conclusions regarding our two questions:

- 1) What percent of our students receive A's?
  - The percentage of A's is consistently above 70%.

- It even reached 91% in the fall of 2025 (Spring of 2026 is not included in the data, as grades for that term were not submitted at the time of this report's drafting.).
- 2) Do part-time or full-time faculty in general give higher grades?
- Part-time faculty had a higher percentage of A's and a higher GPA for five out of six years.
  - The difference in A's given by full- vs part-time faculty ranges from less than one percent (2021-22 and 2022-23) to more than ten percent (2025-26).
  - The difference in GPA given by full- vs part-time faculty ranges from less 0.02 to 0.16.

The differences in A's by year:

2020-21 = 0.64% higher by full-time  
 2021-22 = 9.91% higher by part-time  
 2022-23 = 0.62% higher by part-time  
 2023-24 = 5.17% higher by part-time  
 2024-25 = 7.93% higher by part-time  
 2025-26 = 12.12% higher by part-time

The difference in Average GPA by year:

2020-21 = 0.02 higher by full-time  
 2021-22 = 0.15 higher by part-time  
 2022-23 = 0.05 higher by part-time  
 2023-24 = 0.07 higher by part-time  
 2024-25 = 0.12 higher by part-time  
 2025-26 = 0.16 higher by part-time

When this information was shared with the full-time faculty at the department meeting in May, the faculty noted regarding our two questions:

- 1) Perhaps we have been giving too many A's.
- 2) The difference between full- and part-time faculty is not as high as expected, particularly when we consider the average GPA. But it still is a concern.

We also noted that part-time faculty teach more students than full-time, even more than double in one year (2024-45).

At our May meeting, we also discussed the Yale study, "Trust In Higher Education" that was released to the public in April 2026. It provided some helpful data for comparison with our department and standards for possible comparison with our department to help us decide if there is a problem with grade inflation in our department. In particular, the study noted that,

*Over the past several decades, grading across many institutions has steadily lost its meaning. In 1963, ten percent of grades in Yale College were an A or A-. In 2022–23, that number was seventy-nine percent. Today, the median student at Yale receives an A. Peer institutions are similar.*

*The headline problem is called "grade inflation." But the real problem is compression and the difficulty of making comparisons across different classes, instructors, and fields. As grades cluster, they cease to convey useful information about relative student*

*achievement. And since grading practices vary across departments and programs—with some awarding A-range grades to about half of students and others to virtually all—grades are not comparable in any meaningful sense across courses. Yet the university treats them as if they are all the same: qualitatively through a shared letter-grade system that implies common standards, and quantitatively through a cumulative GPA that reduces these varied judgments to a single number. Grades, like colleges and universities, no longer seem trustworthy.*

*The problem persists because no individual faculty member wants to be the strict grader whose students are disadvantaged relative to peers. No institution wants to be the outlier either. The committee heard firsthand accounts from instructors and lecturers who are not on the tenure track about the particular pressures they face, since their renewal depends largely on student enrollments and evaluations. The result is a collective action problem in which nearly everyone inflates and no one can stop.*

*(<https://president.yale.edu/sites/default/files/2026-04/Report-of-the-Committee-on-Trust-in-Higher-Education.pdf>, p. 19).*

At the May meeting, the department decided to discuss this next year and consider recommending to all faculty that we make a concerted, communal effort to decrease the number of As that we give.

Since that meeting, the reviewers noted a few important news stories about grade inflation, that they will share with the full-time faculty before next year's first meeting.:

- 1) Harvard University's faculty has voted recently to limit A's to about 20% of each class. Last academic year, A's were about two thirds of all grades at Harvard.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2026/05/20/us/harvard-grade-inflation.html>

The article noted some pros and cons to the new policy, as voiced by Harvard community members:

- Pros: Spreading out grades would make them more valuable to employers, graduate school admissions officers, and the students themselves as measures of their mastery of the course.
  - Many cited concerns that the new policy would lead to higher stress, increased competition among classmates, and less willingness to “experiment and take classes in unfamiliar subjects.”
- 2) Princeton University's faculty recently voted to require faculty proctoring of exams, ending a 133 year policy:  
<https://www.the-independent.com/news/world/americas/princeton-proctor-exams-ai-b2976111.html>
  - 3) Stanford University's faculty voted to allow faculty proctoring for the first time in 105 years.:

<https://news.stanford.edu/stories/2026/04/faculty-senate-proctoring-open-access-policy>

- 4) A UC Berkeley researcher found that subject areas with greater likelihood of students using AI (namely the humanities and engineering) had a higher grade inflation. Also, courses in which homework comprises a larger percent of the grade were more likely to have students use AI and produce higher grades.

<https://cshe.berkeley.edu/publications/artificial-intelligence-and-grade-inflation-cshe-higher-education-working-paper-series>

- 5) Notre Dame has created a faculty group to study grade inflation and whether measures should be taken to reduce it:

<https://www.ndsmcobserver.com/article/2026/05/notre-dame-considers-grade-inflation-as-other-institutions-come-under-fire>

### **Future Action:**

As mentioned above, our results were shared with the full-time members of the THRS department by email and discussed at our May department meeting. We decided to discuss this next fall and consider recommending to all faculty that we make a concerted, communal effort to decrease the number of As that we give. In the fall, we will also share the data with part-time faculty as well as the new articles, and others that may arise over the summer, with all the members of our faculty.

At some point, we would like to assess the results our efforts next year, but it will probably take some years to notice any trends, so we may return to direct assessment next year.

We also note that a full solution would require a college or university-wide effort, as the Yale study and various articles mentioned. So the THRS chair has sent that study and the articles to the incoming Arts Council chair and requested that it be discussed again next year.