

ASSESSMENT REPORT REMOTE/DISTANCE LEARNING ACADEMIC YEAR 2019 - 2020

(b) Alternative assessment reflections on distance learning pivot based on this template

I. LOGISTICS

1. Please indicate the name and email of the program contact person to whom feedback should be sent (usually Chair, Program Director, or Faculty Assessment Coordinator).

THRS Chair: Mark T. Miller

2. Please indicate if you are submitting report for (a) a Major, (b) a Minor, (c) an aggregate report for a Major and Minor (in which case, each should be explained in a separate paragraph as in this template), (d) a Graduate or (e) a Certificate Program.

Please also indicate which report format are you submitting –Standard Report or Reflections Document

We are submitting an aggregate Reflections Document for Majors and Minors.

3. Have there been any revisions to the Curricular Map in 2019-2020 academic year? If there has been a change, please submit the new/revised Curricular Map document.

The Curriculum Map has been updated with several courses approved in the past 2-4 years. Additionally, the THRS 395 Special Topics and 398 Directed Readings have changed from “Introductory” to “Developing” as these are taken by students who have already had at least one course and are taking one of these as a special course to develop knowledge and skills they were introduced to earlier. Often, students who take these classes are majors who use these courses for their senior capstone project.

II. MISSION STATEMENT & PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Were any changes made to the program mission statement since the last assessment cycle in October 2019? Kindly state “Yes” or “No.” Please provide the current mission statement below. If you are submitting an aggregate report, please provide the current mission statements of both the major and the minor program

Mission Statement (Major/Graduate/Certificate): No.

Mission Statement (Minor): No.

MISSION: Dept. of Theology & Religious Studies

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.

3. Were any changes made to the program learning outcomes (PLOs) since the last assessment cycle in October 2019? Kindly state “Yes” or “No.” Please provide the current PLOs below. If you are submitting an aggregate report, please provide the current PLOs for both the major and the minor programs.

Note: Major revisions in the program learning outcomes need to go through the College Curriculum Committee (contact: Professor Joshua Gamson, gamson@usfca.edu). Minor editorial changes are not required to go through the College Curriculum Committee.

PLOs (Major):

- 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.
- 2) **Religious Diversity:** Students analyze various religious traditions, as encouraged by Vatican II's stance on the Catholic Church's relationship with other faiths.
- 3) **Social Justice:** Students investigate and articulate how religious and theological traditions can work effectively for social justice and for the good of the entire human family and the environment that sustains it.
- 4) **Theory & Methods of the Study of Religion:** Students 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.

PLOs (Minor): Same as the major.

III. REMOTE/DISTANCE LEARNING

1. **What elements of the program were adaptable to a remote/distance learning environment?**

Faculty reported several elements that were adaptable:

- PowerPoint presentations by the professor or sometimes students
- Discussions with the whole class or small groups
- Lectures
- Debates using assigned topics and sometimes teams
- Showing films
- Zoom polls were a “fun way to get students interacting with the material.”
- One who taught a service-learning/CEL course that focused on visiting an elderly home thought that video chats between students and seniors worked well.
- Group discussions by students outside of class seemed to work.
- A few reported increased attendance levels, with almost all the students never missing a class.

2. What elements of the program were not adaptable to a remote/distance learning environment?

Faculty reported a few aspects that were difficult or not adaptable to remote learning, such as:

- Almost all thought that attendance, attention, and discussion by students decreased.
- A couple thought large classes (30-40 students) were particularly difficult to teach, since it was tough to gauge student involvement in class.
- Deadlines were extended by a few.
- In class quizzes were dropped by some.
- Blackboards were missed by a few.
- Grading online (Canvas or Turnitin) took much longer for many faculty members than paper grading.
- First Year Seminars and other courses could not do off-campus activities that built community in other, normal years.
- Reaching students who lived in very different time zones was a challenge. Most faculty recorded their lectures for students who might miss class. Some scheduled regular meetings with students, but one reported that “many times they didn’t show up.”
- One reported a loss of the ability to foster organic, Socratic discussions: “Delivery of lectures was adaptable to online teaching. While in a live classroom, I would normally avoid Powerpoint and use a combination of the board, handouts and speaking, with interactive questions, online I find this becomes impossible because students simply will not engage at that level in a Zoom class. This changed the teaching experience, making it almost impossible to engage in the Socratic method that I normally use, and forced me into a more linear, less organic organization of materials. Breakout rooms were minimally effective. Many students do not participate in breakout sessions. I used them primarily as a means to provide some student interaction, but could not rely on them to achieve much pedagogically.

- A couple reported a strong decline in student engagement at mid-semester, stronger than during in-person courses, and one thought it coincided with the announcement that next semester would be online as well.
- One mentioned that while all elements of the course seemed to work online (lecture, discussions, movie clips) “they were not as meaningful for students and the classes were far less engaging for multiple reasons.”

3. What was the average proportion of synchronous versus asynchronous learning for your program or parts thereof? A rough estimate would suffice.

Almost all faculty members reported teaching synchronously, with perhaps 75% teaching exclusively synchronously, 20% taught mostly synchronously, and 5% taught mostly asynchronously. One member of the department had a fully online course, but still met weekly with students.

Of those who taught mixed courses, 2 said it was due to students not paying attention to lectures. One split the class in two and had half the class attend one day synchronously while the other half was asynchronous, then they’d reverse the next day. Another taught 2 of three courses per week asynchronously “The main reason was that over a quarter of my students were located overseas and in time zones which would make it nearly impossible to attend a live Zoom class. One day a week I held a live Zoom class, which was recorded and distributed to the class. I estimate that a third of the class followed the course entirely asynchronously.”

4. For what aspects of learning is synchronous instruction effective and for which ones is asynchronous instruction more effective?

Very few faculty taught in both methods and thus felt comfortable assessing the two. Faculty reported several advantages to synchronous instruction:

- It let the professor promote a community among students, from discussions both with the entire class and in Zoom “breakout rooms.”
- It allowed students to ask spontaneous questions
- It allowed the professor to adjust the lecture to student questions, facial expressions, etc.
- For group discussion, synchronous Zoom “breakout rooms” were generally preferred to asynchronous Canvas discussions.
- Some mentioned live classes were better for “checking in” on students, whether about class work, the virus, the election, or other issues we were all facing.
- Some found that students were willing to attend class live even if they had to get up in the middle of the night.

Some reported advantages to asynchronous learning:

- A couple found asynchronous better for showing videos on YouTube or Zoom either ones they had recorded or others. Some found it challenging to share the screen with videos live.
- Two reported that Canvas discussions allowed for increased participation by some students, “especially non-native English speakers and shy students.”
- Students seemed to reliably watch recorded lectures, since they could do it at a time convenient to them (particularly helpful for international students).
- One professor preferred asynchronous Canvas discussions to Zoom breakout rooms.

5. As remote/distance learning continues in the current environment, what changes has the program instituted based on experiences with remote instruction?

The program as a whole has not required faculty to make change, however, faculty reported several changes they chose to make this semester, many of them developed with the aid of ETS courses:

- Most added more breakout rooms to motivate student engagement. One used it less, thinking students rarely talked about the topic, and instead used it to socialize (which the person thought did add some value).

- more Powerpoint or screensharing instead of writing on a board
- less time spent on lectures
- One changed a usual final “project presentation” as listed in the syllabus to “canvas submission” due to zoom challenges including two major zoom bombings.
- A few added videos since they thought students paid less attention to lectures while online.
- One professor allowed students to “audio-record a paper and submit that if they need to give their eyes a break from the screen.”
- One professor teaching a SL/CEL course reported using “Adobe Spark video program - students made short 10 minute videos editing their zoom mtg recordings with their elders.
- One gave more non-academic articles and short videos than usual.
- Several spent more time talking about current events (virus, election, etc.) than usual.
- One added more independent fieldwork.