

THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES - AGGREGATE (MAJOR & MINOR)

ASSESSMENT REPORT ACADEMIC YEAR 2017 – 2018 REPORT DUE DATE: 10/26/2018

Who should submit the report? – All majors, minors (including interdisciplinary minors), graduate and non-degree granting certificate programs of the College of Arts and Sciences. Programs can combine assessment reports for a major and a minor program into one aggregate report as long as the mission statements, program learning outcome(s) evaluated, methodology applied to each, and the results are clearly delineated.

Note: Dear Colleagues: In an effort to produce a more streamlined and less repetitive assessment report format, we are piloting this modified template for the present annual assessment cycle. We are requesting an assessment report that would not exceed eight pages of text. Supporting materials may be appended. We will be soliciting your feedback on the report as we attempt to make it more user-friendly.

Some useful contacts:

1. Prof. Alexandra Amati, FDCD, Arts – adamati@usfca.edu
2. Prof. John Lendvay, FDCD, Sciences – lendvay@usfca.edu
3. Prof. Mark Meritt, FDCD, Humanities – meritt@usfca.edu
4. Prof. Michael Jonas, FDCD, Social Sciences – mrjonas@usfca.edu
5. Prof. Suparna Chakraborty, AD Academic Effectiveness – schakraborty2@usfca.edu
6. Ms. Corie Schwabenland, Academic Data & Assessment Specialist- ceschwabenland@usfca.edu

Academic Effectiveness Annual Assessment Resource Page:

<https://myusf.usfca.edu/arts-sciences/faculty-resources/academic-effectiveness/assessment>

Email to submit the report: assessment_cas@usfca.edu

Important: Please write the name of your program or department in the subject line.

For example: FineArts_Major (if you decide to submit a separate report for major and minor); FineArts_Aggregate (when submitting an aggregate report)

I. LOGISTICS & PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES

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).

Chair: Vijaya Nagarajan (nagarajan@usfca.edu)
Faculty Assessment Coordinator: Cathal Doherty SJ (cdohertysj@usfca.edu)

2. Were any changes made to the program mission statement since the last assessment cycle in October 2017? 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.

Yes.

Mission Statement (Major and Minor)

“A major or minor in Theology and Religious Studies prepares students for the demands of a rapidly changing world, and reflects the university’s justice and service-orientated mission.

Religion is one of the most powerful social forces shaping the world of the 21st century. An understanding of religious traditions, a passion for social justice, and sensitivity for cultural difference help students navigate our religiously complex world.

Our programs systematically and critically explore human religious experiences in different cultures, so students become familiar with major religious traditions, values, and symbols. Students are encouraged to explore the religious dimensions of their own lives; appreciate the role of religion in life, drawing conclusions about human dignity and rights, freedom, and responsibility; and develop awareness of the relationship between faith and justice.”

3. Were any changes made to the program learning outcomes (PLOs) since the last assessment cycle in October 2017? 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.

No.

Program Learning Outcomes:

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 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. Which particular Program Learning Outcome(s) did you assess for the academic year 2017-2018?

PLO (iii) "Social Justice", as in the previous year 2016-17.

II. METHODOLOGY

5. Describe the methodology that you used to assess the PLO(s).

For example, "the department used questions that were inputted in the final examination pertaining directly to the <said PLO>. An independent group of faculty (not teaching the course) then evaluated the responses to the questions and gave the students a grade for responses to those questions."

Important Note – WSCUC advises us to use "direct methods" which relate to a direct evaluation of a student work product. "Indirect methods" like exit interviews or student surveys can be used only as additional complements to a direct method.

For any program with fewer than 10 students: If you currently have fewer than 10 students in your program (rendering your statistical analysis biased due to too few data points), it is fine to describe a multi-year data collection strategy here. It would be important to remember that every 3 years, we would expect you to have enough data to conduct a meaningful analysis.

Important: Please attach, at the end of this report, a copy of the rubric used for assessment.

The THRS department exclusively services the core curriculum. We do not offer courses reserved for majors or minors (with one exception, "Theories and Methods" THRS 101). Therefore, extraction of direct data from student work is difficult, a task that is compounded by the very small number of THRS majors and minors. In any given course, there will be at most one or two of our majors or minors in a class of 40. Oftentimes, there are no THRS majors or minors in the courses we offer.

For these reasons, distinguishing between assessment of the Core curriculum PLOs and assessment of THRS PLOs poses a particular challenge: the usual method of obtaining direct data from every student in a given course would yield results that are mostly irrelevant to the assessment of our major and minor program. Therefore, in 2016-17 and with the approval of the AD for Academic Effectiveness, we tried a novel method — extracting data from our students directly, but *outside* the framework of particular courses. This method consists in sending out a question by e-mail to all our majors and minors. This is not a questionnaire soliciting opinions. Rather, it yields direct samples of student written work focused on a particular PLO. A major problem with this method was that student response rates were, predictably, low. We received only five written responses.

In 2017-18, therefore, we decided to change tactics and to take advantage of the THRS 101 “Theories and Methods” course, obligatory for all majors and minors. Due to low student numbers, this course has not been offered every year, and was not available in 2016-2017 for data collection. In Fall 2018, however, thirteen students are enrolled and so, we had a rare opportunity to collect direct data from a dedicated THRS class.

Multi-year strategy

For reasons outlined above, we received only five samples of direct data from THRS students in 2016-17. Therefore, following new directives, we decided to adopt a multi-year strategy for the evaluation of PLO (iii), permitting a more accurate picture of how students are mastering this PLO. This year, we have thirteen additional responses.

Methodology

The data consists in one of the major exercises for the THRS 101 course: i.e. an autobiographical reflection expressing how students’ academic engagement with religious studies and/or theology is rooted in their human experience. Responses were freeform, allowing students maximum scope to emphasize the aspects of their engagement they regard as most important to them. Responses ranged from 4 to 16 pages in length. They were evaluated not by the instructor, but by other department members.

III. RESULTS & MAJOR FINDINGS

6. What are the major takeaways from your assessment exercise?

Before presenting the results, some further explanation of the nature of this data sample is in order as well as some caveats regarding its interpretation. First, while THRS 101 is restricted to THRS students only, it contains students at all class levels, including some freshmen, as well as majors and minors. Therefore, it is to be expected from the outset that the mastery of the PLO may not appear as successful as it might in a class that consisted entirely of seniors, for example. Second, the introspective and autobiographical nature of the exercise may have contributed to students’ focusing on themselves as individuals, rather than on questions of the common good, social justice or the environment.

On the whole, the exercise yielded mixed results. Some aspects were encouraging — 10 of 13 students expressed concern for LGBTQ justice issues within the framework of religious traditions. Only 2 of these students, however, articulated concern for other aspects of social justice or the common good. Moreover, no students brought up environmental concerns. The results are tabulated as follows:

Level	Percentage of Students
Complete Mastery of the outcome	0%
Mastered the outcome in most parts	15%
Mastered some parts of the outcome	62%
Did not master the outcome at the level intended	23%

Given the caveats outlined above, however, it would be premature to conclude that the department is doing badly in the delivery of this PLO, especially given the very positive results we obtained last year in the evaluation of the same PLO. Nonetheless, the results are of some concern.

IV. CLOSING THE LOOP

7. **Based on your results, what changes/modifications are you planning in order to achieve the desired level of mastery in the assessed learning outcome? This section could also address more long-term planning that your department/program is considering and does not require that any changes need to be implemented in the next academic year itself.**

While we do not envisage any major changes in curriculum or course design to address the issues raised by this assessment exercise, we do propose, however, that, at the level of faculty discussion and planning, instructors be encouraged to re-emphasize PLO (iii) in the delivery of their courses, especially, in relation to environmental concerns.

8. **What were the most important suggestions/feedback from the FDCD on your last assessment report (for academic year 2016-2017, submitted in October 2017)? How did you incorporate or address the suggestion(s) in this report?**

Apart from updating our website to include previous changes in mission statement and correcting an inaccurate presentation of our PLOs, the most important feedback from our last assessment was that THRS would continue be creative in developing collection methods.

This year, in shifting our focus from an out of class collection method to an in class collection method, taking advantage of the THRS 101 course, we have addressed the suggestion directly.

Moreover, in addition to the direct data exercise outlined above, we also attempted to obtain indirect data by means of a survey sent out to majors and minors by e-mail in September 2018. Unfortunately, no responses were received. In the coming year, we will attempt to obtain this secondary data by means other than e-mail solicitation. One possible strategy to improve response rates would be to work through student advisors to obtain secondary data — by the administration of a question (written or oral) to students during advising sessions.

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

(Any rubrics used for assessment, relevant tables, charts and figures should be included here)

Rubric for Assessment of PLO (iii)

Complete mastery of the outcome: roots three elements (social justice, good of human family, environment) in concrete religious tradition.

Mastered the outcome in most parts: roots two elements (social justice, good of human family, environment) in concrete religious tradition.

Mastered the outcome in some parts: roots one element (social justice, good of human family, environment) in concrete religious tradition.

Did not master the outcome at the level intended: roots none of these elements (social justice, good of human family, environment) in concrete religious tradition.