

**Academic Program**  
**Plan for Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes**  
College of Arts and Sciences  
The University of New Mexico

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**A. College, Department and Date**

1. College: College of Arts and Sciences
2. Department: Religious Studies
3. Date: January 29, 2016

**B. Academic Program of Study**

B.A. in Religious Studies

**C. Contact Person(s) for the Assessment Plan**

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**D. Broad Program Goals & Measurable Student Learning Outcomes**

1. Broad Program Learning Goals for the B.A. in Religious Studies

As indicated in the descriptions we include in the UNM Catalog, completion of the major in Religious Studies will enhance the liberal arts experience for UNM undergraduates and help prepare them for their post-baccalaureate pursuits. Regardless of which major option our students elect to pursue, our general goal is to deepen their knowledge of religion, teach them skills that will be an asset to them whatever their chosen career paths may be, and to instill in them values that will help them to become life-long learners.

Knowledge A-Goal: We want all our graduates to have a broad knowledge of the history of religions. By the end of their course of study, they should be aware of issues in the four distributional areas: Asian Religions, Western Religions, Sacred Texts, and Religion in America.

Skills B-Goal: We want our students to master the fundamental skills of critical reading, persuasive writing, and critical thinking.

In regard to developing the ability to read critically, we want our students to be able to follow complex, sustained reasoning about the historical, textual, and theoretical issues scholars of religion find important, and to appreciate the cultural significance of those problems. In regard to developing critical thinking skills, we want our students to be able to approach historical events, religious traditions, and sacred texts with a critical eye and assess the merits of the religious interpretations being advanced. Doing so effectively requires that they are able to identify what the author is asserting and what explicit and implicit assumptions the author is making. Students must analyze the

view or interpretation an author or text presents to support a claim, assess whether the view or interpretation actually supports the conclusion drawn, and determine whether there are good reasons to deny the truth of the claims the author or text makes.

In regard to their writing skills, all our majors are asked to compose essays containing persuasive arguments throughout the course of their study. Their general goal is to learn how to clearly and convincingly argue for a stated position. In our lower division courses, such as RELG 107: Living World Religions, students may be asked to analyze the truth-claims presented in a sacred scripture, while in our upper division courses, students will more likely be asked to defend a particular interpretation of a historical text or critically engage with the ideas forwarded by a central figure in a specific religious tradition. Whatever the assigned task, effectively crafting an argument will require that students clearly present the position they are critiquing and lay out clear and convincing reasons that will persuade readers of their own stated position.

Values C-Goal: The highest goal of a liberal education is to awaken the search for knowledge in students. We want our students to become true learners – curious, independent, people with inquiring minds eager to explore the world and to identify and examine assumptions in their own and others' thinking. There should be nothing they do not want to know about. They should not have to rely on others setting goals for them; they should set their own learning goals. They should take responsibility for their own learning.

Our goal for those students opting to pursue the Religious Studies major is to acquire broad knowledge of the history of religions through study in required courses: 230 (Hebrew Scriptures) or 231 (Hebrew Prophets); 232 (Christian Scriptures); 263 (Eastern Religions); 264 (Western Religions); and 447 (the Capstone Seminar in Religious Studies). In addition to these five required courses, students must also take at least one course in each of the following distributional areas: Asian Religions, Western Religions, Sacred Texts, and Religion in America.

## 2. List of Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) for B.A. in Religious Studies

- A.1. Students will demonstrate an in-depth understanding of the basic beliefs, practices, history, and sacred texts of at least two major traditions of the student's choosing.
- A.2. Students can articulate how religious symbols and narratives are interpreted and mobilized to construct meaning in human life, by individuals and by communities – and how this changes over time or across different communities.
- B.1. Students can utilize a variety of analytical concepts and hermeneutic methods from the humanities and social sciences to describe and evaluate the basic beliefs and practices of at least two major religious traditions, how they have developed historically, and the approaches to sacred writings within those traditions.
- B.2. Students can engage in public dialogue and debate regarding ethical and political issues related to religion.
- B.3. Students can articulate their own thoughts clearly in critical discussion and in writing.
- C.1. Students can engage in constructive dialogue regarding the role religions play in public life in a modern democracy.

- C.2. Students will appreciate the diverse accounts of wisdom and scripturally based moralities articulated by different religious traditions.

**E. Assessment of Student Learning Three-Year Plan**

All programs are expected to measure some outcomes and report annually and to measure all program outcomes at least once over a three-year review cycle.

**1. Timeline for Assessment**

*In the table below, briefly describe the timeframe over which your unit will conduct the assessment of learning outcomes selected for the three-year plan. List when outcomes will be assessed and which semester/year the results will be discussed and used to improve student learning (e.g., discussed with program faculty, interdepartmental faculty, advisory boards, students, etc.)*

Year/Semester	Assessment Activities
Year 1	Revise Program Assessment Plan
Year 1	Collection of Capstone Papers, Exit Interviews of selected Religious Studies Majors.
Year 2	Religious Studies Committee analysis of data collected in Spring 2016
Year 2	Consideration of Program Revisions
Year 3	Implementation of Program Revisions as needed
Year 3	

## 2. How will learning outcomes be assessed?

### A. What:

- i. *For each SLO, briefly describe the means of direct and indirect assessment, i.e., what samples of evidence of learning will be gathered or measures used to assess students' accomplishment of the learning outcomes in the three-year plan?*

To assess our learning outcomes Religious Studies faculty employ both direct and indirect assessment measures in the Theories of Religion capstone course, which is offered every Spring semester. These measures comprise (a) direct assessment of the final paper in the RS capstone course; (b) direct assessment of the quality of in-class discussion demonstrated by RS majors in that class; and (c) and direct measure of the overall quality of student learning by means of exit interviews of selected RS graduating majors.

Every Religious Studies course places a premium on the ability to express one's own ideas, analyze others' ideas, and develop persuasive arguments in both writing and critical discourse. The mastery of important religious phenomena, texts, and ideas is demonstrated primarily not by "objective tests," which rarely bring the creativity of students into play, but by the ability to articulate and reflect on them in writing and in speaking. Thus, throughout the curriculum our RS major students are regularly expected to write papers (varying in length – the 4-5 page paper remains the standard in lower division classes, and 10-12 page papers in upper division courses and seminars). Students are also expected, throughout the curriculum, to develop the skills of articulating and defending positions, as well as respectfully critiquing the positions of others, in class discussion. Oral presentations are another tool employed in some courses to assess student learning. While assessment of writing skills is conducted carefully by faculty in each course, oral skills are less easily assessed. Evaluation of learning in each course also does not allow for an assessment of students' integral knowledge of the field. Exit Interviews thus are a practical device both for assessing oral critical skills and the effectiveness of individual courses for promoting integral knowledge of the field.

**Capstone Papers and Discussion:** The assessment of student papers in the capstone class gives us a direct method of assessing the writing skills of our students as they approach completion of the RS degree program; specifically, SLOs A.2, B.3, & C.1. The compiled data helps us to determine whether the writing-intensive nature of the classes in RS achieves our goals; if the scores seem to be too low, then we can adjust our course construction appropriately to better assist students in achieving the writing goals that we have delineated. Assessing the quality of the students' in-class discussion (direct method of assessment) enables us to assess SLOs A.2, B.2, B.3, C.1, and C.2.

**Exit Interviews.** The purpose of the interview will be two-fold:

- (a) To collect information about the student's experiences in the undergraduate Religious Studies program and to learn, in particular,
  - which courses the student deemed his/her favorite and least favorite, and why
  - which courses the student felt he/she learned the most in, and why

- in what ways the student thinks the Religious Studies program or our individual courses could be improved

Interview questions can be found in Appendix 1.

(b) To assess the ability of the student to critically engage with religious phenomena and ideas. For example, in the course of the interview the faculty interviewing the student will attempt to engage him/her in discussions about some of the most interesting ideas and theories he/she encountered during his/her course of study, and observe how proficient the student is at articulating his/her own thoughts, outlining views/positions, and reflecting on those views/positions. This measure enables us to assess SLO's A.1, A.2, B.3, and C.1.

- Student performance during the interview will be assessed using an interview assessment sheet. There are six items listed, and students can earn a score from 1 (unacceptable) to 4 (excellent). Our target is to have average scores fall between 3 (good) and 4 (excellent) for at least 2/3 of the questions, i.e., for four out of the six items listed on the rubric.
- Each year we conduct exit interviews, we will identify students who (a) will either graduate that year or the following year, and (b) have taken almost all of the course work for the major. The Outcomes Assessment Coordinator for Religious Studies will identify students to participate in exit interviews. Since the process is entirely voluntary, the OA Coordinator will either solicit students by (a) sending a request for volunteers to the RELIGION listserv or (b) by visiting sections of the 400-level capstone course.
- The Exit Interview will involve two full-time RS faculty members, with interviews to be conducted in the second half of a selected spring semester. We will individually assess the student's performance using the interview assessment sheet (see Appendix 1).

*ii. Briefly describe the **criteria for success** related to each direct or indirect measures of assessment. What is the program's performance target (e.g., is an "acceptable or better" performance by 60% of students on a given measure acceptable to the program faculty)? If scoring rubrics are used to define qualitative criteria and measure performance, include them as appendices.*

**Capstone Papers:** Papers will be assessed according to the scoring rubric that is currently used for assessing assignments in our general education courses (namely, RELG 107, 263, and 264). We expect that our majors will have scores higher than those collected from our general education courses. Using the average scores from our core curriculum courses as a baseline, success will be measured by the percentage of majors who score higher than the Gen Ed average. Our target is to have at least 60% of the student papers score above the baseline.

**Capstone Discussion:** Because the capstone course is a seminar typically with less than fifteen students, the majority of class-meetings is discussion based. This gives the instructor a rich understanding of the knowledge and abilities of the students. Class discussions are evaluated by the course instructor according to five of the student learning outcomes and are rated according to a standard scale.

**Exit Interview:** Student performance during the interview will be assessed using the interview assessment sheet (included below in Appendix 4). There are six items listed, and students can earn a score from 1 (unacceptable) to 4 (excellent). Our target is to have average scores fall between 3 (good) and 4 (excellent) for at least 2/3 of the questions, i.e., for four out of the six items listed on the rubric.

### **3. What is the unit's process to analyze/interpret assessment data and use results to improve student learning?**

*Briefly describe:*

1. *who will participate in the assessment process (the gathering of evidence, the analysis/interpretation, recommendations).*

**Capstone Papers:** Each spring semester, beginning spring 2016, the Outcomes Assessment Coordinator for Religious Studies will collect 5-10 final papers submitted by students in the capstone course. (Capstone course enrollments typically range from 7-15.) At the beginning of the following fall semester, a committee of two full-time faculty will assess the papers according to the same scoring rubric that is currently used for assessing assignments in our general education courses. (See Appendix 2.) Each faculty member will individually assess all the papers based on the scores generated using the rubric. The committee will then convene and draft a report on the students' performance that will be presented to Religious Studies Lecturers during fall semester.

**Exit Interviews:** A committee of two faculty will conduct exit interviews near the end of a selected spring semester. Each committee member will individually assess the student's performance during the interview using the interview assessment sheet (included below in Appendix 1). The committee will submit a report detailing what was learned from the interviews and presented to the Religious Studies Lecturers in the subsequent fall semester.

2. *the process for consideration of the implications of assessment for change:*
  - a. *to assessment mechanisms themselves,*
  - b. *to curriculum design,*
  - c. *to pedagogy*  
*...in the interest of improving student learning.*
3. *How, when, and to whom will recommendations be communicated?*

In the following fall semester, Religious Studies Lecturers will examine the data collected from exit interviews and the reports compiled by the exit interview committee. We will use this data and the committee recommendations as we consider possible revisions to (a) the rubrics used for the Religious Studies major assessment, (b) the curriculum for the Religious Studies major, and (c) the assignments and methods we use in the courses required for our major.

If the Religious Studies Lecturers recommend changes to the rubrics used for the Philosophy major assessment, these will be communicated to the department's Outcomes Assessment Coordinator, sometime after our first faculty meeting of the year. Any recommended changes to the curriculum for our majors will be communicated to the Program Director. Changes in pedagogy will be considered by full-time faculty members and also communicated to other instructors in the Program sometime after our first faculty meeting of the year.

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### **Appendix 1: Exit Interview Protocol for Religious Studies Majors**

We anticipate that the exit interviews will take roughly 15-20 minutes to complete. The goal is for faculty to engage the student in an informal discussion about his/her experience in our program and gauge the student's proficiency in speaking about religion from his/her answers. Thus, the questions below are intended as a guide for conducting the interview rather than a rigid protocol.

- 1) Which Religious Studies course was your favorite, and why?
- 2) Which Religious Studies course helped you develop most as a thinker, and why?
- 3) Which Religious Studies course helped you develop most as a writer, and why?
- 4) Did the material covered in the historical survey classes (namely RELG 263 and RELG 264) prepare for more focused study of individual religious traditions and topics?
- 5) What do you find to be the most pressing problems in religion and society?

- 6) Which historical figure in religion, or what historical problem in religion, do you find to be most relevant to problems in contemporary culture?
- 7) Are you considering pursuing a graduate degree in Religious Studies? If so, what problem or which figure, tradition, or problem would you like to focus your future research on? If not, in what ways do you think what you've gained from the RELG 263 will inform your career aspirations?
- 8) What would you say has been the greatest benefit of completing the Religious Studies major at UNM?
- 9) Are there ways in which you think the Religious Studies program or any of our individual courses could be improved?

Exit Interview Assessment for Religious Studies Major

Once the interview is complete, each faculty member on the review committee will rate the student's performance in the following categories.

SLO A.1: Students will have an in-depth understanding of the basic beliefs, practices, history, and sacred texts of at least two major traditions of the student's choosing.

a. Student has basic knowledge of the core beliefs and practices of at least one major tradition.

Unacceptable	Acceptable	Good	Excellent
1	2	3	4
			N/A

b. Student can identify a key challenge facing at least one religious tradition in the contemporary world.

Unacceptable	Acceptable	Good	Excellent
1	2	3	4
			N/A

c. Student can identify key changes in attitude towards the significance of at least one religious tradition's sacred texts.

Unacceptable	Acceptable	Good	Excellent
1	2	3	4
			N/A

SLO B.3: Students can articulate their own thoughts clearly in critical discussion.

Unacceptable	Acceptable	Good	Excellent
1	2	3	4
			N/A



SLO C.2. Students will appreciate the diverse accounts of wisdom and scripturally based moralities articulated by different religious traditions.

g. Student connected the study of religion to his/her own life.

Unacceptable	Acceptable	Good	Excellent
1	2	3	4
			N/A

SLO C.1. Students can engage in constructive dialogue regarding the role religions play in public life in a modern democracy.

h. Student explained some general way(s) in which the history of religions is related to contemporary social and cultural problems.

Unacceptable	Acceptable	Good	Excellent
1	2	3	4
			N/A

What changes, if any, did the student suggest for the Religious Studies program?

What changes, if any, did the student suggest for individual courses in Religious Studies?

**Appendix 2** Capstone Course Paper Rubric for Religious Studies Majors

Development Of Intro & Conclusion Grammar/ Mechanics/ Language	Explication of Argument	Analysis of Argument	TOTAL
#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	

4= Excellent	2=Acceptable
3=Good	1=Not Acceptable

Semester Course, Section Number
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Interpretation / Reflection results/ trends. What worked in this assignmet
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