Religious Studies Department

Program Review Committee Report

Building on the Past

*What has prompted the current assessment plan?*

Request of the Program Review Committee

Outcomes

*Has the department identified the student learning outcomes that will be the focus of the assessment activity?*

**Department Specific Goals**

*For students of the entire college:* All students at Westmont College are required to take Life and Literature of the Old Testament, Life and Literature of the New Testament, and a course in Christian Doctrine as part of the General Education requirement. Other religious studies courses may also meet general education requirements.

The biblical courses will provide knowledge of the Bible and theology that will enable our students to read and apply Scripture responsibly and with understanding. This involves an appreciation of the importance of the original social and historical setting of the Bible, sensitivity to the Bible’s many genres, and an orientation to the relationship between the canonical books. Furthermore, all our students will graduate with an awareness of the most important critical questions of interpretation. They will be disabused of overly simplistic and wrong views of Scripture and theology and will have a more empathetic understanding of views other than their own. Finally, we want our students to encounter models for applying and embodying Scripture—models rooted in Christian community and proven in the life of the church.

1. knowledge of the Bible
2. knowledge of theological discussions
3. sensitivity to critical problems of biblical interpretation
4. basic knowledge of biblical backgrounds
5. awareness of biblical genres
The course in Christian doctrine introduces students to the fundamental teachings of the Christian faith: God, creation, humanity, sin, Jesus Christ, last things, Church, and salvation. Using the Bible, the practices of the various Christian churches, and the history of Christianity as sources and guides, it focuses on the substance, logic, and integrity of Christian belief (including its dependence on the Holy Scriptures of the Church), the ethical (that is, practical) form the faith takes in Christian community, and the historical shape of Christian tradition. More specifically, the course allows participants

1. to weigh the visions of various Christian communities of the identity, character, and work of the God of Jesus Christ in the world's creation and redemption
2. to gain an understanding of the historical teachings and practices of Christian traditions
3. to grasp the centrality of Jesus Christ and his gospel to the Christian tradition
4. to connect Christian theology with Christian practice, centering both on the life of the worshipping Church
5. to gain facility in faithful, responsible, imaginative Christian biblical practices
6. to strengthen academic discipline, particularly regarding good writing, listening, and critical reading
7. to become actively and personally engaged with the discipline of faithful Christian theological enquiry

Other religious studies courses that may meet GE requirements (such as history of global Christianity, world religions, and theological history) introduce students to those fields of study in ways that honor the integrity of faith and knowledge, the breadth and depth requirements of general education in the Christian liberal arts, and the character and agenda of the specific disciplines themselves

For our majors: Beyond the goals for all our students, we want our majors to have a more extensive and deeper knowledge of the Bible and theology, an exposure to the history of the church and world religions, and experience interpreting and enacting Scripture in the service of the church. We want them to know the mission of God and of the Church. We want them to be catechized and trained in catechizing others. We want to cultivate a deeper love for their field and a deeper formation in its practices. We want them to begin becoming leaders. They need to understand the terrain, the contexts, the history, the purposes, and the constitutive practices of their disciplines. They need to understand their disciplines’ relationships with other disciplines in religious studies, as well as philosophy, history, arts, and social and physical sciences.

For our majors heading to seminary: We want our majors to have a foundation that will allow them to plunge into seminary work at an advanced level. In many seminaries, this will mean having some introductory courses waived. We want to avoid having our
students ill-prepared to handle critical issues raised in graduate school especially if the environment is hostile to a high view of Scripture.

Assessment Strategy

Methods of assessment:
1. We will prepare entry (for all students in our GE classes) and departure (for majors) assessments in Bible and theology. The initial assessment can be taken in the form of basic Bible and theology test that will be given in the first week of classes in Bible and/or theology. The final test is more problematic and can probably only realistically be given to our majors unless the college would require an exit interview of all.
2. Exit interviews with some majors and with selected non-major graduates. A tool will be prepared to make the most of such interviews.
3. We will also develop a survey that will be given to RS alumni who are 5, 10, 15, etc years from graduation in order to see how their Westmont RS education continues to influence them.

Use of Results

The data will be collected and shared with the members of department by means of an annual report. The department will then discuss strategies to strengthen the positives and correct deficiencies that the report reveals.