DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

SELF-ASSESSMENT

I. Christian Orientation

We acknowledge and celebrate the foundational role of the Department of Religious Studies in the development of “Christian Orientation” in our students, but we also recognize that we share this responsibility with the entire college. Any account of the standard of “Christian Orientation” for the RS department is significantly shaped by the amount of teaching that we do in GE classes: two-thirds of our course load and 70%-80% of our student load is GE. We embrace our role in the college GE program. But we also recognize that though as faculty we can assess knowledge to a large degree in these classes, any other assessment is difficult. Here we need to find ways to involve the entire Westmont community. We believe that we can more readily assess all outcomes for our majors (as opposed to GE students) because of the smaller class size and personal contact.

A. Current Strategies

1. Knowledge

The courses in OT and NT are focused on knowledge of Scripture, but every course in the RS department seeks to familiarize students with Scripture. In the Bible courses, students are required to read large sections of the Bible—often for the first time. In doctrine and history courses, students are held responsible for biblical passages that have been of particular importance to various doctrines and historical debates and developments. In world religion courses, students are required to know the biblical passages that give a perspective on other religions.

Knowledge of biblical scholarship is primarily pursued in the biblical studies classes. At every level, students are introduced to the tasks, the history, and the contemporary issues of biblical scholarship through assigned reading, lectures, and research projects. Knowledge of biblical scholarship is secondarily pursued in doctrine and church history classes as students study the role of biblical scholarship in doctrinal controversies and the development of the church.

Knowledge of Christian doctrine is taught in the lower-division GE course in doctrine and in the upper-division courses in theology, but it is also taught in the Bible courses as students study passages relevant to doctrine. The development of doctrine is also a significant part of the church history courses. Christian doctrine regarding other religions is a significant component of the courses in world religions.

Knowledge of church history is taught by the history courses, but it is also a significant part of the doctrine courses as students study the development of doctrine and the divisions in the church.

Knowledge of world religions is the aim of courses in that field. That knowledge is taught by our own faculty as well as numerous guest lectures by representatives of other religions.
In these courses, faculty also seek to demonstrate the relevance of the Bible, doctrine, church history, and world religions to other disciplines. None of these can be studied in isolation from such disciplines as literature, philosophy, sociology, economics, biology, and physics. In each of these courses, we also address challenges to the faith, seeking to help students understand those challenges and think critically about the challenges and the faith.

Knowledge of devotional resources is one of the central aims of the Foundations in Spiritual Formation course. It also comes from assigned readings in Bible courses that note the devotional riches of scripture such as the Psalms, and through assigned reading of the devotional literature of the church in courses in doctrine and church history. Assigned texts include Augustine's Confessions, Bonhoeffer's Life Together, and an anthology of devotional texts.

2. Practices

We are deeply committed to the practices of Christian faith identified by this standard. These practices arise naturally through our study of the Bible, doctrine, history, and religions. For example, each of us explicitly charges students with the practice of Christian integrity in their thinking by being honest about challenges to Christian faith and by stressing the importance of integrity on exams and research projects. Similarly, passages from the OT prophets and from the NT writings, and the study of liberation theology and episodes in church history call us to justice and peacemaking. This is also emphasized by assigning autobiographies of those involved in social justice, by viewing and discussing the movie "Romero," and by considering the role of the church in society. One of the practices that we view as central is prayer. We model this in our own classes by praying and by inviting voluntary student prayers. We have a course on spirituality which especially emphasizes spiritual disciplines, or Christian practices, such as self-reflection, church involvement, prayer, service, and stewardship. All students are required to make a rule for themselves of disciplines they intend to practice for the semester. They must keep a spiritual journal, and meet weekly with their spiritual director. At the end of the semester they give an oral self-assessment of their rule (how they kept it and how they grew) in a meeting with the professor and a written self-assessment of their involvement in the course.

3. Affections

We seek to form our students' affections by displaying our own devotion to God and enjoyment of our subject matter. In our lectures, we note the ways that particular biblical passages and doctrines guide and deepen our worship of God. One professor requires students to evaluate a hymn or worship song in light of Christian doctrine. Another requires students to evaluate a recent worship service in light of the doctrine of the Trinity. Our enjoyment of other people is modeled by our own approach to learning from others with whom we may have significant differences.

4. Virtues

Specific biblical passages (1 Cor 13, Gal 5, Eph 4) lend themselves to reflection on theological virtues. In our classes, our faculty emphasize the role of intellectual virtues for understanding and
interpreting texts, doctrines, and events. Many of our assigned readings also introduce students to the virtues.

B. Assessment

1. Knowledge

We assess knowledge outcomes through weekly assignments that include such exercises as answering questions on biblical passages, reflection on their own church background, and the connection between Christian doctrine and contemporary issues. We also assess outcomes through exams that include multiple choice, matching, short answer, and essay. In upper-division courses, we assess outcomes through class discussion and through writing assignments such as critical book reviews, term papers, and essay exams. In these smaller classes, and even in some of our larger GE classes, we also assess outcomes through Socratic questioning and discussion of lectures and readings. In the church history course, the professor devotes significant time leading discussion sections that assess students' knowledge and understanding.

2. Practices

Assessing practices is difficult within the confines of the classroom, though office interviews and casual conversations with our students suggest that many are being formed in these practices by our classes.

3. Affections

Concerning affections, we regularly call students to assess their priorities in light of the subject matter. However, as the standard notes, affections are difficult to assess. One way that we assess this area is by assigning small group work so that students learn to appreciate others whose views may differ from theirs.

4. Virtues

Once again, the area of virtues is difficult to assess. Like the affections, the development of virtue requires considerable personal contact and involvement in students' lives. To some degree we can evaluate this standard anecdotally with our majors, because we have significant personal contact with them. But that is difficult to do in a GE class of 65-120.

C. For Improvement

We believe that on the whole our assessment of outcomes for this standard is well developed. One future practice of assessment in the knowledge area that we discussed is giving our students "entry" and "exit" exams in Bible, doctrine, and church history. With regard to practices, affections, and virtues, we could do more by assigning exercises that lead students to evaluate their priorities. We could also do more to invite student reflection on the impact of our courses on their worship of God. Finally, we think that more could be done here to involve other segments of our community
in assessing these outcomes. We would also welcome more discussion of ways to assess outcomes for this standard in the Westmont community.

II. Critical and Interdisciplinary Thinking

A. Current Strategies

1. Critical Thinking

The department of religious studies actively teaches students critical thinking skills, interdisciplinary research skills, complex problem solving, the limits of critical thinking, and how to collaborate in their research, writing, and group discussions. The department teaches critical thinking skills by constantly asking students to compare and contrast. In Old and New Testament courses students are required to examine the two creation accounts in Genesis and then compare the creation account in the Bible to the Epic of Gilgamesh in Ancient Near Eastern literature. Students are also asked to explore the two accounts of the conquest in Joshua and Judges and the two accounts of Abijah in Kings and Chronicles. Students compare the different gospels to learn about the synoptic problem. These comparisons, and many others like them, are made not to confuse or undermine a student's faith, but rather to enable them to think critically about passages in the Bible that have been difficult to interpret. After examining these difficult passages, we offer students a variety of ways that scholars have interpreted these passages throughout the history of the church. Rather than have students walk away indifferent, we actively encourage students to embrace an interpretation that is consistent with their understanding of the Bible and their denomination.

These kinds of critical thinking exercises also take place in theology and church history courses. Students are asked to confront knotty theological debates over the doctrines of the Trinity, Christology, the Holy Spirit, Predestination vs. Free Will, Original Sin vs. Original Righteousness (Augustine vs. Pelagius), and the debate over orthodoxy and heresy. They are also asked to explore controversies over the Crusades, the Inquisition, conflicts with other religions, schisms, reformations, capital punishment, the role of women in the church, social justice, missions, imperialism, colonialism, capitalism, and environmental issues that impact the church. Students are asked to engage in critical self-reflection about themselves, their denomination or religious tradition, and Evangelical Christianity. Students are also asked to learn how to compare and contrast some of the basic differences between Catholic, Orthodox, mainline Protestant, Evangelical, and Pentecostal Christianities. All of this is done with an attempt to appreciate the rich and diverse perspectives each tradition brings to Christianity while at the same time not diminishing the contributions that Evangelicalism has made to global Christianity.

In addition to the more specific examples of critical thinking skills students learn in religious studies courses, they are also taught how to evaluate primary and secondary literature. They are also taught how to analyze books, articles, and speeches by examining the fundamental presuppositions that undergird the author's thesis. Students are also taught how to write problem-centered research papers and how to use critical research tools like various forms of biblical
criticism and theoretical approaches to the study of religion. Finally, our students are constantly asked to distinguish between theological and cultural statements and positions in the Bible, theology, and history of Christianity.

2. Interdisciplinary Thinking

Religious studies, is by its very nature, interdisciplinary. For this reason, our faculty naturally draws upon the work of philosophers, historians, sociologists, psychologists, political scientists, linguists, and anthropologists. The interdisciplinary nature of religious studies is not only evident in the kinds of theories, methodologies, and approaches we take to the study of the Bible, theology, church history and missions, but also to important social issues like poverty and wealth. We look at these kinds of issues from theological, biblical, political, and economic perspectives.

Although almost all members of our department draw on interdisciplinary ideas and approaches in teaching their courses, we also draw upon scholars from other disciplines from both inside and outside of Westmont College. For example, an anthropology professor was invited to a New Testament course to discuss sociological approaches to the New Testament. A psychology professor and a UCSB religious studies professor were invited to address psychological and sociological approaches to the study of religion in a new course on History and Theory of Religion. Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and Jewish religious and lay leaders have visited the campus to speak in the course on World Religions.

In addition to bringing in guest speakers from other disciplines, the religious studies department also assigns books and articles written from interdisciplinary or non-theological perspectives. For example, students in Old Testament Theology are required to read James Barr's, "The Bible as a Political Document." Likewise, in a course on North American Religions, students are assigned Roger Finke and Rodney Stark's, The Churching of America, 1776-1990, a sociological analysis of American religious history. Almost everyone in the department assigns historical novels, fiction, poetry, biography, and films as creative and interdisciplinary approaches to the study of religion.

3. Complex Problem Solving

As can be seen from above, religious studies deals with complex problem solving through the critical questions we explore. Religious studies courses regularly raise complex problem-centered and problem-solving questions. Much of this is accomplished through in-class and small group assignments and on exams, quizzes, and in research papers. Group discussions are the most popular way of problem solving. Although students are shy about initiating conversation, they are not as shy about sharpening another student's opinion. Our department assesses problem solving through exams, papers, quizzes, and during class discussion. In addition to the collaborative efforts noted above, the religious studies department also has taken the lead in sponsoring a Mayterm course in the Middle East. Next May one of our religious studies professors will team up with one of our science professors to lead students through Israel, Jordan, and Egypt, studying the Bible, history, archaeology, geography, and geology.
The religious studies department is well aware of the inadequacy of explaining the mysteries of God. For this reason, we openly discuss the limits to human knowledge and understanding. Students learn that as important as biblical criticism is, it cannot take the place of faith and cannot always explain articles of faith. We teach our students that sin has affected not only our mind, but also our perceptions, emotions and will. For this reason, there are limitations to what we can know about God through reason alone. We discuss the impact of sin on the human experience and on our knowledge of God. We point out that Christians are bound to a higher knowledge and one that may lead Christians occasionally to engage in civil disobedience. We discuss how Christian mystics attempt to apprehend God through experience, meditation, and prayer. While we stress to our students that we are called upon to be ready in season and out of season to give an account of the hope that lies within us with fear and trembling, we also teach our students that it is a mistake to try to prove rationally, articles of faith, through syllogistic reasoning or demonstrable proofs.

Faith is beyond reason, but not without reason. Examples of this are discussions of Thomas Aquinas's realization that reason can only take one to the "vestibule of faith." Similarly, he points out that although we should ground our faith in history and demonstrable proofs, that ultimately some articles of faith are above and beyond reason. In the final analysis, the religious studies department tries to teach our students through precept and example that a true apprehension of God is demonstrated by loving God and our fellow human beings with all of our heart, mind, and strength.

B. Assessment

1. Critical Thinking

Students are assessed in their critical thinking skills through papers, exams, speeches, debates, quizzes, book reviews, and critical response papers to guest lectures. Their critical thinking skills could be improved by more debates, round-table discussions, and by bringing in more guest lectures.

2. Interdisciplinary Thinking

It is more difficult to assess interdisciplinary thinking because most people in the department do not consciously think about assessing it on exams and in papers, book reviews, and class presentations.

3. Complex Problem Solving

Although difficult to assess, the most common ways we assess this area is through exams, papers, debates, book reviews, class discussions, and discussions in the cafeteria and outside of class. The most straightforward way of improving our discussion of the limits of critical thinking is to begin and end our class with a discussion about how faith and reasons are natural allies. Despite this fact, we must always beware of allowing our critical thinking skills to trample upon
the Christian ethic of love of God and neighbor. Otherwise, we show that we have in fact not truly learned what it means to be a Christian. In short, our attitude is often a barometer and indication of how well we have understood what we have learned.

C. For Improvement

The religious studies department is by its very nature interdisciplinary and engaged in critical thinking about all aspects of the Christian and non-Christian religions. This process involves complex problem solving, collaboration, and recognition of the limits of critical thinking skills. Our knowledge is not demonstrated by content alone, but also by how our knowledge leads us to act. We believe we are very successful in most areas of this standard. However, interdisciplinary thinking is one area that the department could improve on. It could be more conscious about giving and assessing interdisciplinary assignments and about how these assignments prompt or enable students to develop interdisciplinary thinking skills.

III. Oral and Written Communication Standard

A. Current Strategies

1. Oral Communication

In-class oral communication tends to decrease as class size increases. Many students who might communicate freely in a class of 15 or 25 understandably remain safely quiet in a class of 60 or 80.

Most faculty use large and small group discussion formats to encourage oral communication. Individual student contributions are difficult to assess, especially in large classes, though their contributions do provide feedback on whether or not students are grasping new concepts and avoiding cliches. Some instructors require students to prepare written comments on the reading, which then serve as the basis for in-class discussion. Upper division electives, which devote considerably more time to open discussion, emphasize fair-mindedness and the open exchange of ideas.

Oral presentations are also common, though the results (value to others, quality, grammar) are sometimes disappointing. Students may be asked to present orally to the class the heart of their written research. Honors sections sometimes incorporate panel discussions that address two sides of a controversial issue. The fourth semester Greek class requires each student to present orally a passage of scripture on which the student has worked all term. These presentations may take the form of a sermon or speech.

Discussion sections work well in honors sections and smaller upper division classes. One professor lectures on Mondays and Wednesdays, but reserves Fridays for discussion sections. Students are given special readings and are required to prepare written responses to discussion questions. Then they are expected to participate in the Friday discussions, which are based on those readings and questions. Another professor, who has larger classes (45 or so) and a
Tuesday/Thursday schedule, divides the class into two discussion sections. He lectures on Tuesdays and holds discussion sections on Thursdays, meeting half the class for the first hour of the period and the other half of the class for the second hour.

Some professors schedule class-wide debates. These encourage lively (and hopefully civil) exchanges on selected topics. The entire class is divided into two groups, which must defend opposing positions.

Extra-curricular activities (Erasmus Society Lectures, Rated RS film screenings, departmental picnics, conferences, etc.) provide additional opportunities for verbal interaction and discussion on theologically important topics.

2. Written Communication

In our large GE classes (ranging from 40 to 80 students and sometimes more), it is not realistic for faculty to require and grade large amounts of written work. And yet written communication skills are crucial. Various faculty handle this dilemma differently. Some set short answer and/or essay exams (e.g., on the relevance of the Old Testament for the Christian). Others require weekly written assignments, some of which are read out loud and discussed in class. Others require reflective writings responding to readings (e.g. a letter to someone who has suffered a loss; an evaluation of an author’s Christology; an analysis of the political forces at work during a period of history).

Upper division electives require substantial written work: research papers, projects, essay exams, reading journals and book reviews, all designed to develop research, critical thinking, and communication skills. Typically bibliographies must include journal articles and primary literature and, increasingly, web-based resources. Faculty provide written feedback on student submissions.

Threaded discussion is a hybrid (oral/written) mode of communication. With the use of web-based technology (e.g., Blackboard.com, on which see the Technology standard), students are being asked to participate in asynchronous threaded small-group discussions. This is particularly useful in large classes in which face-to-face student interaction rarely involves more than about 15% of the class. The web format also enables the instructor to listen in (asynchronously) on each group, and to generate statistical reports on participation.

B. Assessment

We are pleased with what we accomplish given our present resources. However, large GE courses inhibit discussions and make it difficult to assign much written work.

C. For Improvement

Although some students give outstanding oral presentations, some in our department expressed disappointment in the quality of student work when oral presentations are assigned. Since we do
not have the resources to do a lot of instruction in public speaking, we would favor a required introductory course in public speaking.

Smaller class size would encourage shy students to participate orally, and would increase the number of opportunities for each student to contribute.

We would like to develop a departmental Writing Handbook, including sections on style, web-based sources, gender inclusive language, proper book review technique, etc. This would be posted on our web page and distributed to all RS students.

Most members of the department would favor hiring senior students and recent RS graduates to oversee discussion sections and tutorials in our large GE classes. Certainly some of our top students would be competent to do this successfully. However, there is some question as to whether we would find enough qualified students who could fill this role.

IV. Diversity Standard

Students have the understanding and skills to engage people unlike them in terms that affirm the other as another person created in God’s image. Students are able to approach the other respectfully avoiding vilifying, romanticizing, or victimizing.

A. Current Strategies

The RS department is committed to the diversity standard and is addressing it directly in most of its courses. In the first place, we point out that the composition of the department demonstrates a measure of diversity in gender and ethnicity. Furthermore, there is, within the parameters of our commitment to evangelical theology, a significant diversity of theological opinion with different views on eschatology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and more. We are united in our basic commitment to the gospel and the Scriptures, but within that fundamental and important commitment, there are differences among us. Both these areas of diversity are relatively rare in evangelical academic institutions.

In our courses, both upper level and lower level, there is encouragement toward self-reflection on how our theological viewpoints as well as our biblical interpretation are influenced by social class, gender, ethnicity, culture, and historical moment, and we encourage our students to discuss and analyze this dimension of their thinking.

In New and Old Testament classes, there is explicit and frequent discussion of how we all wear “lenses” through which we read the Bible. Some of our classes give specific examples or lead the student through exercises which illustrate this point. One class, for instance, discusses Bible studies and sermons from different traditions with the objective that students will become aware of how their own backgrounds influence their reading. This exercise does not lead to a relativistic biblical interpretation but encourages students to become aware of how their biases may unconsciously distort their interpretations. It also provides impetus for them to feel at home in a community that includes people from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, it encourages them
to read widely to jar themselves out of their own myopic worlds. In another New Testament class, the students are challenged to ask themselves what kind of Jesus they have created and to compare that with the actual presentation of Jesus in the gospels. As part of that exercise, the students read a historical novel where the main character is a hired spy for the Romans who interviews a number of people about Jesus, each of whom has his or her own “take” on who Jesus is. Old Testament classes follow suit on this issue. The theologians do as well. The question why a particular doctrine takes shape at a specific historical moment is often at the forefront of discussion. For instance, what was it about the early church and the time of Luther that made the Christus Victor view of the atonement so popular? While warning against the genetic fallacy, the students are led to see a close connection between theology and culture. Issues of diversity are naturally large ones for the history of Christianity and world religions, regularly taught by the department. Theological, ecclesiastical, national, regional, ethnic, racial, gender, and class diversity are all relevant. In our course on spirituality, students are exposed to different spiritualities within the Christian tradition (Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal). Not infrequently, guest speakers, field trips, and films are used to supplement lectures to expose our students to these diversities. This is especially true in the world religions and spirituality courses.

Our students cross another cultural boundary as they come into contact with an ancient text. This, of course, happens in all our courses, but we will illustrate with the Old Testament here. We make a large effort in our classes, both lower level as well as upper level, to recreate the ancient world. It is sometimes unsettling for our students to comprehend the cultural distance between their world and the world of the Bible. Too many students grow up with the Old Testament in contemporary translation and treat it as if it were written yesterday.

Lastly, since this standard also speaks of the advantages and insights to be gained from exposure to foreign languages, we will also mention that our department provides instruction in Hebrew and Greek. In addition, our Bible courses also allude to these languages from time to time as well.

B. Assessment

Assessment has proven to be a difficult matter (see below). However, there are some means of assessment presently in place in our department. In the first place, examinations in our courses probe whether the student “gets it,” at least in terms of content. Second, a number of our classes require feedback papers to books or field trips that bring our students into contact with diverse viewpoints. This exercise allows for evaluation not just of content but also of attitude toward the content. Thirdly, class discussions on topics of diversity also provide a non-graded means of assessment that allows faculty members to monitor understanding and attitudes.

Members of our department would like to do more but are restricted in part by resources and finances (see next section). Also, we recognize that outcomes assessment could be improved, particularly in areas outside of intellectual content. We can teach and model tolerance toward diversity, but we cannot compel our students to be tolerant. Furthermore, assessing actual tolerance is a nearly impossible task. Occasionally, we get a window on it in a small number of
cases, for instance when one of our members takes some students to Israel for a class. There he has the opportunity to observe students in the midst of a diverse culture. It is important to note that there is some measure of disagreement in our department over whether it is our department’s responsibility to assess in this area.

C. For Improvement

Our discussions on this topic exposed a number of areas where we would like to increase our resources in order to meet the diversity standard for our students. We list them in no particular order:

We would like a larger budget for guest lecturers and field trips. The guest lecturers would be individuals who articulate and represent diverse religious and/or ethnic perspectives. The field trips would allow our students to travel to another world. Santa Barbara has only a small measure of diversity, while Los Angeles has a number of resources in this area. We realize too that the San Francisco urban program is very good in this area, but it serves only a small percentage of our students.

We would like to build up our video collection. Videos are a less expensive way to bring diverse viewpoints into our classrooms. However, this does not mean they are cheap and they need to be periodically updated.

We would also like to bring leading academics representing other traditions to Westmont. Examples given were an Islamic historian or a Jewish novelist.

We also have as a departmental goal the development of our missions program by the addition of a full-time Professor of Missions.

V. Active Societal and Intellectual Engagement

It is certainly the desire and intent of the Religious Studies faculty to see the qualities listed under this standard evident in our students and graduates. However assessing the extent to which these qualities are present and developing is not straightforward, as they may be fully evident only in years subsequent to graduation when the constraints of the college are not imposed. Moreover, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of our involvement in producing these qualities as if a direct cause-effect relationship existed. As one of our faculty observed, “The description of this standard sounds like the development of the wise person in the book of Proverbs. I can point them to the content and the good models in the text, but as the book of Proverbs points out ‘In the mouth of a fool a proverb becomes as limp as a paralyzed leg.’” We work as if it all depends on us, but recognize that much of this standard requires a work of the Spirit, and we pray that the Holy Spirit would produce fruit in this area in the lives of our students and graduates.

Nevertheless, we are pleased to offer our assessment of how we believe the RS curriculum and faculty contribute to the achievement of this standard.
A. Current Strategies

1. In the Classroom

In the departmental setting, the primary forum for active societal and intellectual engagement is in the classroom. All of the RS faculty are committed to fostering active classroom experience rather than passive. We expect our students to engage the material, the professor, and other students actively. By holding them accountable to simple life skills such as arriving on time, showing up prepared for the day’s activity, truth-telling in their relationships with us, and giving opportunity for student-led prayer and Bible reading, we intend to develop skills that will be transferable to the workplace (#1, 3, 5). We intend to create a “safe” space, and deliberately encourage shy and quiet students to participate. Most of us include small-group activities that allow students to engage the material and each other. In short, we manage the classroom dynamics to model respectful engagement at both the intellectual and societal level and to practice skills that students will need to engage their world effectively after graduation.

This standard is particularly amenable to role modeling, which all of the RS faculty do through maximizing our interaction with our students and through appropriate self-disclosure. Most of us share something of our personal spiritual journey, our commitment to the local church, involvement in the wider community, and our scholarly research and writing.

The effectiveness of our efforts is assessed through personal contact with and observation of our students.

2. In the Curriculum

The gospel demands engagement in issues of social justice (#2, 6 in the list of expected outcomes for this standard), loving others as ourselves (#2, 6), stewardship of creation, time, money, and knowledge (#2, 3, 5, 6), developing a sense of Christian vocation (#3, 5), and a life-time of learning for the glory of God (#3, 4). All of these are intentionally included in both the content and structure of the RS courses.

The overall objective of our curriculum is to develop in our students a biblical world view, which necessarily involves study of God’s concern for the poor (e.g., OT prophets, Luke), God’s standards of morality that must inform life choices (e.g., Ten Commandments, the beatitudes, biblical definition of love, fruit of the Spirit, transformation of character), the spiritual nature of and implications of marriage (e.g., Nehemiah/Ezra, 2 Cor. 6), and the contextualization of Christianity in other cultures.

Many of our courses intentionally discuss the cultural and sociological context of Christianity in other places, such as Latin-American liberation theology, feminist theology, and third-world hermeneutics. This is not only to inform the student, but also to make him or her conscious of the plight of others and to be active participants in bringing spiritual and material relief to those in need. In the NT GE classes, passages concerning suffering and socio-economic issues from Luke, John, and 1 Peter are presented to stir students to reflect on the cost of discipleship vs. an
easy beliefism. Several of our courses specifically direct the student's attention to persecution of Christians in other places through lectures, small group discussions, electronic resources, videos, Web sites (www.persecution.org), and readings, for instance Their Blood Cries Out by Paul Marshall.

Sensitivity to others in need (#2, 6) is developed through lectures, small group discussions, and readings and response papers. For instance in the Christian Doctrine course students read and write a response paper to Let Justice Roll Down or Justice for All, both by John Perkins. Students practice sympathtic response by writing a hypothetical bereavement letter after reading Woltersdorff's Lament for a Son.

It is, of course, expected of all students that they will assume responsibility for their learning (#3, 4), and the RS faculty hold them to this in various ways. In one GE course, a grade-point system is used that defines the total number of grade-points needed for each letter grade, and presents a menu of various learning activities that students may chose from to earn grade-points (though all students must take the final exam). In another course students are allowed to select their own due-dates for written work, but then are held to it. Most of us discourage extra-credit work, as we have found it tends to reinforce irresponsibility for the successful completion of assignments. Web resources, such as Blackboard.com are being explored and tested for their effectiveness in allowing students to take charge of the depth and extent of personal study time. Study guides are distributed in some lower-division courses not only to communicate content, but to model for students what level of detail and structure they should aspire to in their own note-taking elsewhere. Many of us provide bibliographies for further reading beyond the course requirements, exposure to software tools of general use in Bible study, and mention interesting books we ourselves are reading to model on-going learning in our own lives. Naturally, the best way to assure student responsibility for their own learning is to inspire in them a love of learning and a passion for at least one academic discipline. None of us would be teaching here if we had not attained this in our own lives; we desire it for our students as well.

3. Extra-curricular

Although our primary forum for achieving the standards is the classroom, some active intellectual and societal engagement occurs in departmental and campus extracurricular events. The RS department is one of the sponsors of the Erasmus lecture series, and we not only encourage our students to attend, but often give grade point credit for written responses to the lectures. The department sponsored the Rated RS film series for our majors last year, which was well attended and provided a forum for a discussion of Christian values in comparison to contemporary culture. The series is continuing this year.

Many of us encourage our students to become appropriately involved in projects that have an in-community component. However, there is some concern that many of our students are already over-committed to extra-curricular activities at the expense of their primary college vocation, academic study, and that they see their coursework as interfering with more important things. At least one of our faculty has supervised a dorm special-interest-group (SIG) in which seven female students devoted an academic year to developing spiritual disciplines and community outreach
activities. The faculty advisor had dinner with them every three weeks throughout the year in the DC and then met with them in the dorm for prayer and to help plan their activities. Throughout the year they performed regular frequent volunteer service at the Santa Barbara Rescue Mission, completed an effective fund-raiser for a well-digging project in Nigeria, and assumed various leadership activities in their local churches.

B. Assessment

We are doing many excellent things to stimulate growth in this standard (inputs) and we are satisfied that we do observe fruit in the area of outcomes as well.

C. For Improvement

Although we believe the RS department provides both curricular and extra-curricular activities that achieve this standard in the lives of our students and graduates, some ideas arose from our self-assessment discussions that would further this end.

The only way we could think to assess our actual effectiveness in achieving this standard in the lives of our students and graduates is to survey our alumni/ae 5 years and 10 years out from graduation with a well-designed questionnaire. This survey would assess their continued learning, church and civic involvement, and professional (and marital?) choices. We would want to provide it in both paper and web page formats. Money and time would be needed to design, distribute, and analyze the survey.

If there were money provided for transportation, we could take junior or senior RS majors to regional professional conferences, introducing them to an arena in which many of them will hopefully one day participate, even if they end up in other fields.

We would like to develop a bibliography of essential tools for life-long learning as a Christian that would be distributed to our graduates and posted on our web page.

We would like to publish a newsletter each semester for RS alumni, possibly edited by current students, that would update information on former classmates, faculty, as well as possibly provide Christian thoughts on current events or social issues.

VI. Technology

A. Current Strategies

1. Basic Familiarity with Current Technology and Software
   a. Opportunities to Observe Technology in Use

Almost all RS courses use various forms of technology for in-class presentations (e.g., overhead projector, VCR, CD/cassette player). Although we do not teach students how to use these
devices, students observe how technology may be integrated into the classroom and how it enhances the learning experience.

This summer Porter Theatre (which is used for some large GE classes) has been equipped with a wireless connection, a new data projector and a laptop computer for presentations and web access in class. This should significantly improve the learning environment and will allow us to demonstrate certain research techniques and visit certain sites in class.

Some faculty are beginning to incorporate PowerPoint presentation software into their lectures. Some are now making syllabi available on the web. Syllabi composed in HTML are dynamic documents: elements can change during the semester, they can contain hot links to other relevant sites, both internal and external. One such example may be found at: www.westmont.edu/~fisk/COURSES/lnt2000.html.

b. Hands-on Experience

We assume basic literacy with word processing software, e-mail access, and internet search capabilities. Most RS courses encourage/require students to use e-mail. It is being used to inform students of class events/changes, to communicate with faculty, to engage in asynchronous class discussions, and to provide faculty feedback on oral presentations. Numerous assignments require students to access web links and databases as part of their research. Tools being used include First Search, Ebscohost, ATLA, and CD-ROM collections. Some assignments must include one or more web sources, and the finished paper or project must have a complete (and sometimes annotated) bibliography of both standard and electronic resources. HTML syllabi are also able to direct students to selected sites of relevance for the announced lecture topic. Although e-mail can be used for class discussions, beginning this fall some have begun to experiment with Blackboard.com, a “Course Management System” that uses the web to coordinate various class-related functions, including announcements, discussions, lecture outlines, etc. Using a “C.M.S.” makes it easy to conduct asynchronous, small group discussions on the web, and allows the instructor to monitor each discussion and to track usage. This allows students reluctant to speak out in a class of 50 or 80 to give public expression to their ideas. On occasion, students may choose to submit an assignment as a web page rather than as a traditional paper. This assumes that the student already has required skills with HTML, Adobe PageMill, etc.

2. Use of Computers in Academic Research

On occasion, library support staff have been invited into a class to conduct a lab session on using a particular database (e.g., ATLA). More often, instructors encourage students to ask library staff for help with databases, or they provide one-on-one, in-office tutorials. The Biblical language courses make use of tutorial programs and linguistic search/retrieval software. Currently, students enjoy one-on-one sessions with their Greek instructor on the use of Bible Works® and Accordance®.

3. Critical evaluation of information acquired by electronic means
Faculty are using in-class discussion to teach students how to think critically about contemporary film, and its impact on popular culture. Last year the RS department began *Rated RS*, an extracurricular event particularly targeting RS majors. Together, interested faculty and students screen selected films and then discuss their message, relevance, etc. This was very well received. Faculty are also using in-class discussion to stress the need to distinguish between legitimate (i.e., university, institution or scholar-based) websites and vanity sites. Faculty can assess students’ abilities to distinguish good from bad by conducting their own visits to the web resources students list in their assignments. The RS department is in the process of developing its departmental web page. It will include an organized collection of web-links to the best RS-related sites currently available. This will steer both current students and alumni toward the more valuable sites.

4. The Ethical Use of Technologies

   a. Plagiarism and the Web

RS faculty continue to discuss the alarming spread of e-plagiarism among our students, and we intend to include explicit policy statements in future syllabi, defining appropriate uses of the web, and spelling out the penalties for infractions. Each member of the department has a current list of blocked term-paper sites and is aware that by special request individual faculty can be unblocked. We have encouraged one another to browse these sites to learn something of the sort of papers currently available, and have discussed the benefits of using www.plagiarism.org for investigating suspicious student submissions.

One of the most effective solutions may be simply to assign unique paper topics. We should avoid assigning generic topics (straightforward book reviews, biographical sketches, etc.) and should be careful about allowing students to select their own topic. It may become necessary for Westmont to purchase a site license for a plagiarism-detection service that would automatically scan all papers. This would probably mean requiring students to submit all papers electronically.

   b. Etiquette and e-communication

It is easier to be rude in cyber-space than face-to-face. Some students have shown they lack basic e-mail etiquette; they say things to faculty via e-mail that they would probably never say in person. Accordingly, as we increasingly require our students to communicate via e-mail and the web, we need also to discuss with them proper protocol, politeness, conciseness, etc. Students can also be encouraged to monitor one another in this area.

B. Assessment

Though most of us are attempting to keep up in this area and some of us more advanced than others, we recognize that all of us have room to grow in the technology standard. As we do, we may find new ways to implement technology in the classroom, and new ways to assess our students’ growth in these areas.
C. For Improvement

As faculty, we have room to grow in our familiarity with web-based resources. If web-based resources like Blackboard.com prove to be pedagogically sound, more of us may want to make use of this resource.

We also need to get our RS web site and our individual faculty pages up and running this year. And we need to keep abreast of developments in anti-plagiarism resources; a lax approach only rewards the plagiarizers and penalizes honest students.

The new technology in Porter Theater is proving to be a marked improvement. However, since it is not yet built-in (nor will it be for the foreseeable future), it will continue to require a lot of time and effort setting up and dismantling the various tools (VCR, laptop, data projector, CD player) for each class period. It would be a great help if (a) IT or other support staff could oversee set-up, pre-testing and disassembly, or (b) we could equip another large room with permanently installed technology.

A color printer in Porter Center would enhance handouts and classroom presentations.