

## Annual Assessment Report

Department: Religious Studies

Academic Year: 2024-25

Date of Submission: Sept 30, 2025

Department Chair: Holly Beers

### I. Response to the previous year PRC's recommendations

<b>Item:</b> Strengthening department culture	<b>Response:</b> During the 2024-25 school year dept chair Holly Beers initiated several dept events, including a dinner at her house. Charlie Farhadian hosted a second faculty dinner at his home. The RS dept also hosted an event with both faculty and students at Sandy Richter's home.
<b>Item:</b> Equity in departmental teaching loads	<b>Response:</b> In an effort to support equity in teaching loads, the RS GE courses are now capped at 45 rather than 50, and at least one faculty member who traditionally teaches smaller courses is now teaching one section of a large RS GE each semester.
<b>Item:</b> Strengthening our departmental diversity	<b>Response:</b> During the 2024-25 school year we ran a faculty search in the area of Old Testament and hired Dr. David Emanuel. We discussed how/where our curriculum aligns with the diversity ILO (Helen Rhee's "Embodiment and Suffering" course fulfills the JRD requirement; several of Charlie Farhadian's courses are possibilities), as well as the Student Diversity and Grade Reports.
<b>Item:</b>	<b>Response:</b>
<b>Notes:</b>	

### II A. Program Learning Outcome (PLO) assessment

*If your department participated in the ILO or GE SLO assessment you may use this section to report on your student learning in relation to the assessed ILO or GE SLO. The ILO assessment data can be requested from the Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness.*

<b>Program Learning Outcome</b>	This year's PLO is hermeneutical competence: Students "apply a range of recognized skills in the interpretation of biblical and other religious literature." It therefore pertains to secondary sources as well as biblical primary sources. The nature of assignments tended to leave biblical background considerations in the background while foregrounding critical appraisal of the secondary sources (Addison's What Jesus Started, "Ordinary People," a contemporary worship service, etc. I looked not only for students' awareness, skill, and use of various considerations, but their 'fluency' and wisdom in drawing them together into insightful overall interpretation of secondary and biblical texts' messages.
<b>Who is in Charge /Involved?</b>	Telford Work, who taught RS-180: Senior Seminar
<b><u>Direct Assessment Methods</u></b>	Direct assessment of actual student work according to RS assessment rubric: Assignments assessed were the final written assignment and a dialogue.
<b><u>Indirect Assessment Methods</u></b>	
<b>Major Findings</b>	<p>The assignments are in Appendix A.</p> <p>Overall score: eight 4's and two 3's, averaging 3.8. On the whole, students demonstrated both skill and wisdom in applying hermeneutical knowledge to understand texts as well as act on what they learned. A number of them surveyed courses in the major that equipped them in various areas they found pertinent to answering assignment questions through both secondary and biblical texts. Weaker performances (3's) had more to do with student motivation and effort than lack of ability or exposure to these skills along the way in their college careers and the major.</p> <p>Telford Work's suggestion: I note that in our rubric, sheer quality of interpretation is secondary to its sophistication, and to its use of background/critical perspectives. [Jesus' use of OT passages would rate a 3!] I suggest that the rubric should be revised so that we 'major in the hermeneutical majors'—helping students understand what writings mean—without neglecting the many factors that contribute to that understanding, but don't necessarily ensure it.</p>

	<p>Student #1: 4: demonstrated facility with background and foreground interpretive considerations in secondary sources and (as applicable) in biblical sources</p> <p>Student #2: 3: basic but reliable treatment of secondary and biblical texts, channeled through senioritis</p> <p>Student #3: 4: displayed awareness of a wide range of hermeneutical considerations from across her courses, used deftly and holistically</p> <p>Student #4: 4: aware of foreground and background considerations of the various sources, interpreting through them accurately and fruitfully</p> <p>Student #5: 3: interprets accurately but basically; doesn't pursue depth, but can and has when and where motivated</p> <p>Student #6: 4: this is better evidenced in an earlier dialogue assignment pertaining to secondary and biblical sources, whereas her approach to the final assignment was more existential and immediately practical</p> <p>Student #7: 4: synthesizes foreground and background interpretive considerations consistently, smoothly, and persuasively</p> <p>Student #8: 4: demonstrating facility with background hermeneutical considerations in producing a powerful reactualization of the way of the cross recontextualized in different past and present settings</p> <p>Student #9: 4: shows a coherent consistency in messages across different biblical, secondary, and church contexts while adjusting for multiple contextual differences (historical, social, audience and occasion, etc.), especially in the earlier dialogue assignment</p> <p>Student #10: 4: aware of contextual factors in interpreting biblical, historical, secondary, and embodied (e.g., live liturgical) sources to as to identify commonalities with existential and ethical import</p>
<b>Closing the Loop Activities</b>	<p>We are utilizing more class time to build skills rather than telling students information.</p> <p>We are focusing more (in readings, in discussion, in assignments, etc.) on reconstruction and formation rather than deconstruction.</p>
<p><b>Collaboration and Communication evidence (dates of departmental meetings, faculty present, decisions made, etc.)</b></p> <p>In the Sept 24, 2025 department meeting, we discussed this PLO. Richter, Reeder, Beers, Work, and Emanuel were present.</p>	

or/and

## II B. Key Questions

Key Question	
Who is in Charge/Involved?	
<a href="#">Direct Assessment Methods</a>	
<a href="#">Indirect Assessment Methods</a>	
Major Findings	
Recommendations	
Collaboration and Communication evidence (dates of departmental meetings, faculty present, decisions made, etc.)	

## III. Follow-ups

Program Learning Outcome or Key Question	How might we better organize and schedule global offerings run by RS faculty?
Who was involved in implementation?	The entire department was involved, as most RS faculty teach and lead in global programs.
What was decided or addressed?	We began our discussion by highlighting Mayterm and summer programs, as Richter leads an Israel Mayterm, Beers has led a "Footsteps of Paul" Mayterm, and Farhadian leads an India summer program. In the past Reeder co-led a program focused on conflict in Europe and Israel/Palestine with Deborah Dunn. We agreed to rotate the programs offered so as not to compete with each other for students.

<b>How were the recommendations implemented?</b>	By mutual agreement, though Richter's Israel Mayterm has been postponed by Westmont for several years. Beers's and Dunn's Mayterm programs are uncertain. Farhadian's India program is scheduled for summer of 2026.
<b>Collaboration and Communication evidence (dates of departmental meetings, faculty present, decisions made, etc.)</b> The discussion occurred over several department meetings, and all dept members consented to the decision.	

#### IV. Other assessment or Key Questions related projects

*General Education Learning Outcomes Assessment Schedule*

*2024-2025: GE Senior Survey*

<b>Project</b>	Our department surveyed and discussed the results of the 2024-25 GE Senior Survey as it relates to our curriculum.
<b>Who is in Charge /Involved?</b>	The entire department
<b>Major Findings</b>	<p>-We're unsurprised by the results, but still find it helpful. Because we teach every student on campus, we expect both very positive and very negative comments (at least some of each).</p> <p>-The "great divide" between the few students who know a lot about the Bible and theology and the many who know very little (even students who grew up in the church often fall into this group) is very challenging.</p>
<b>Action</b>	-We are all experimenting in our classes with a variety of pedagogical approaches in order to "catch" more students and reduce the negative feedback. For example, we're using a variety of Bible translations (including those that are more accessible), and even giving hard copy Bibles to students. We are having students read more accessible textbooks that tie big-picture aspects of the Bible and Christian history together. We are working to make the basics a bigger feature in our classes: bigger points, basic skills, etc., are receiving more attention, along with the time in class needed for students to practice knowing and using them.
<b>Collaboration and Communication evidence (dates of departmental meetings, faculty present, decisions made, etc.)</b> This was discussed in the department meeting on Sept 24, 2025. Present were Holly Beers, Telford Work, David Emanuel, Sandy Richter, and Caryn Reeder.	

## V. Adjustments to the Multi-year Assessment Plan (optional)

Proposed adjustment	Rationale	Timing

## VI. Appendices

- A. Prompts or instruments used to collect the data
- B. Rubrics used to evaluate the data
- C. Relevant assessment-related documents (optional)

### Appendix: Assessed assignments:

#### 1: Are DMMs ‘Biblical’?

Addison’s *What Jesus Started* contends that Jesus laid down the template for making disciples of all nations, shared it with the Twelve, and continued and contextualized it for the Greco-Roman world through Paul’s team—and that it remains effective and available in the present-day, as disciple-making movements demonstrate. In other words, DMMs are (or can be) ‘biblical.’

Maybe you basically agree; maybe you basically don’t. In this assignment, "iron sharpens iron." Imagine you are describing the book’s thesis to an actual authority you know (*e.g.*, pastor, author, teacher, even Westmont faculty). You mention your agreement or your skepticism, and that person challenges you from a stance contrary to yours.

*Articulate that challenge as best you can and to respond, back and forth, in the form of a dialogue.*

One of the goals of this assignment is for you to discover how compatible Addison’s account is with the treatments of the Old and New Testaments you’ve encountered in your own education in churches and schools, including Westmont. Where do they match, complement, and/or conflict? (Either side, or both, could draw on Newbiggin’s lectures if you like.)

Your dialogue need not come to a conclusion, though it may if you prefer. The main point is comparison/contrast through a robust, informed challenge to your present view.

Aim for 1,000 words or so. On the due date, bring two hard copies and two copies of the peer review form linked ... from the syllabus' Tasks page, because you will be peer-reviewing two other students' submissions.

## **2: Final Assignment**

Our 'theology' course has, as much as anything, been a *theological method* course. Theology is the study of God and the things of God; so how do people come to know? There are standard formal theological answers, such as the popular Wesleyan Quadrilateral: "through scripture, tradition, reason, and experience." That's fine, but so abstract that it could cover Jewish and Muslim theological method too. So by itself it's *too* abstract.

Such abstractions classify specific practices that have 'taught' (caused people to learn) specific things. Such specific practices straddle all our Christian traditions.

Disciple-making movements are setting aside good but 'old wineskins' that are more resistant to flexing with new wine, streamlining some key practices such as the seven sabbaths, and pursuing them so that essential knowledge of God and God's ways propagates in deepening, gathering and multiplying ways. That's a theological method! It shares similarities and overlaps with those older 'legacy' Christian traditions, including movements across history right back to the New Testament era (as Addison shows). It generates both personal testimonies of coming to know God, and a family of newer traditions now numbering in the thousands and on every inhabited continent. And those traditions basically share the same faith as the so-called 'legacy churches' out of which they were birthed, which I think is pretty cool for both.

One of the overarching testimonies in both sets of traditions—both legacy (elephant) and simple (rabbit) churches—is that *we participate in the death and resurrection of Jesus in transformative ways*. Disciples in both elephant and rabbit contexts tell stories of discovering that following Jesus really does mean setting aside the desires of our flesh, taking up one's own cross of worldly and even churchly rejection, and following him where the Father leads us. As only Martin Luther could put it (in *Table Talk* 46), "Only experience makes a theologian. Not understanding, reading, or speculation, but living—nay, dying and being damned." Yikes! But no other road leads to life (Matt 7:13–14).

Those testimonies uniquely align with the central liturgical drama of Passion Week, which is about to begin. So Passion Week makes a fitting occasion for our final assignment.

1. Next week in your squads, hold a DBS of 2 Cor 4:10–18, then Mark 8:33–38. If circumstances prevent you from DBSing the passages, you may (with my permission) SOAPS it.
2. Then review our semester's sources, books as well as Newbigin's "Bible Overview" series, the Waha training, and the "Ordinary People" video. **I urge you to do this before Good Friday.**
3. Then participate in at least one, and preferably at least two, gathered remembrances of Jesus' Passion. Typically these would be a Maundy Thursday Tenebrae or footwashing service, Good Friday, Easter Vigil, Sunrise, and/or Easter Sunday services, though you have some latitude as to what qualifies. Use Westmont chapel services only as a last resort, since I'd rather have you engaging in a church gathering than just a 'parachurch' one.
4. After Easter I highly encourage you to fold in sources from other RS courses, church voices, etc. as well, *though not at the expense of this course's voices.*
5. Now you're ready to write:

Where in these sources do you see 'the way of the cross' demonstrated in ways that yield deeper and more fruitful theological knowledge—both knowledge *of* God and knowledge *about* God?

(I myself see it all over: in Addison's sketches of the apostles and their growing networks of communities and then later world-changing movements across our traditions; in Trousdale's-and-Sunshine's Kingdom-value lifestyles; in the Muslim Background Believers whose old lives must end for their new ones to begin; and, in our final book, Shoal Creek's self-sacrificial journey into 'hybrid church' in an American context.)

6. Conclude your written assignment by looking forward:

What will you do with what you have learned? (This doesn't have to be S.M.A.R.T.; it can be a life-long vision you'll pursue, the way Jesus and Paul did with and for their people.) And with whom can you bless and perhaps share it?

Our departmental outcomes for majors involve three areas of development: hermeneutical competence, theological judgment, and ecclesial engagement. Can you demonstrate these in what you do and write?

Length: How about 1,200 words or so?