

DATA-BASED DECISIONS / SUSTAINABILITY

ACADEMIC YEAR 2014-15

(Organized by Learning Objectives)

Students completing the BA or BS degree in Religious Studies should be able to:

1. demonstrate literacy concerning the major religions of the world

Our three-year strategic plan, external peer review, and internal curriculum review determined that our coverage was not consistent across the major world religions. To fill this lacuna,

- We hired two additional faculty—one to teach World Religions and Buddhism, and the other to teach Judaism and Biblical Studies. These hires were completed in Spring 2014 and Spring 2015, respectively, and we have been offering regular courses in these areas since.
- We have boosted offerings in Islam through a History hire in Islamic Asia, and we increased our offerings in East Asian traditions by adding a course in Ancient China.
- Finally, we instituted a religious literacy survey in RELS 1010 in Fall 2014. This survey is based on the Pew Forum's Religious Knowledge Questionnaire and will be administered periodically across all sections of RELS 1010.

2. understand the relationship between religion and culture, and think critically about the influence of religious value systems on individuals and societies

Our coverage of this learning objective was highlighted as an area of strength by the external peer reviewers. Nevertheless, to further build upon our existing strength in this area, we changed major requirements to strongly encourage students to take either "Anthropology of Religion" or "Religion in America." The new requirements took effect in Fall 2015.

3. read and analyze the sacred texts of different religious traditions

Our external peer review and survey of majors indicated that we were not offering enough courses on the sacred texts of major religious traditions. In response, we added RELS 3820 "Hindu Sacred Texts," and we will soon offer a course in the Bible, taught by our new Jewish Studies professor. Furthermore, to ensure that students develop competency in the sacred texts of multiple religions, we changed major requirements to require all majors to take a course in at least 3 different religious traditions. The new requirements took effect in Fall 2015.

4. apply appropriate methods of research and argumentation to questions concerning religion; and

Our comparative study of Religious Studies programs nationwide revealed that our curriculum did not provide sufficient training in Religious Studies theory and method. Thus, we changed our major

requirements to make RELS 3990 (RS Methodology) required for all majors. We added a prerequisite to this course in order to ensure that students take this course at a sufficient level of maturity.

5. communicate their findings in clear, well-reasoned writing

Our capstone course (RELS 4990) provides individualized training in writing skills that are appropriate to the discipline. In order to ensure that writing expectations are consistent across sections of RELS 4990, the curriculum committee decided to make the following change in capstone procedure, effective Fall 2015: all majors must work with their capstone supervisor in the semester prior to registering for RELS 4990. Together, they should create and submit a formal proposal for the capstone project, including a description of the topic, preliminary bibliography, and a work plan. Furthermore, in Fall 2015, we will develop learning objectives specific to the capstone, including writing rubrics.

6. possess a rigorous foundation for pursuing advanced study in religion or related fields

In order to assess our effectiveness in meeting this learning objective, we participated in an alumni survey designed and sponsored by the American Academy of Religion, titled "Survey on the Long Term Impacts of Liberal Education on Religious Studies Majors." The survey results were placed in comparative perspective with universities around the country. We are in statistical alignment with other schools regarding competencies, satisfaction, demographics, and post-graduate training.