

## **Assessment Plan**

Department of Religious Studies

Macalester College

Submitted December 15, 2009

[Working collaboratively as a department, and building on our experience, the department faculty members have crafted the following plan for assessing our work in educating students in the field of Religious Studies. We have attempted to be concrete, avoid overly ambitious plans, and to look for ways that will build a culture of assessment into our work year to year. ]

### **I. Mission Statement**

The study of religion involves two related directions. The first direction appears as the construction, elaboration, and expansion of public knowledge about existing religious traditions. We work with our students to build our collective knowledge of and familiarity with existing religious traditions in their occasionally bewildering diversity. We do so through the investigation of historical, literary, and anthropological records of people who think about questions and engage in practices that we would call religious.

We enact the second direction within the study of religion by reflecting on the processes by which we accomplish the goals of the first direction. We ask: In what ways are the categories of religion, our critical, analytical practices, and our theories of religious belief and practice themselves products of historically situated and contextually meaningful processes? Questions such as this help us avoid cultural and institutional blind spots that lead to misconstruals (romantic, hypercritical, or unbalanced) of the diverse religious communities of the earth.

We commit to educating our students to become cosmopolitan citizens, capable of applying their knowledge of religious traditions to their own complex personal, political, professional, and multicultural lives.

### **II. Learning Goals**

The **goals** we have identified are:

1. Students will develop a sophisticated knowledge of the discipline of Religious Studies, its history, and the current discourses that shape the field in order to communicate the meaning and worth of that work to non-specialists, and use it in a variety of concrete ways after graduation.
2. Students will learn to write a persuasive research paper, with special attention to the following qualities: (a) clear thesis and argument; (2) use of the appropriate primary and secondary sources; (3) prose that is formal, lucid and reasonably accessible to a non-specialist audience.
3. Students will be able to prepare and deliver a clear, persuasive, and accessible formal oral presentation of research.
4. Students will gain a broad, comparative knowledge of more than one religious tradition.
5. Students will be able to apply their knowledge of religion in their chosen careers and to ways of living as citizens in their life after graduation.

### **III. Learning outcomes**

In pursuit of our learning goals, we have articulated the following five learning outcomes. Most learning goals will be addressed in stages, mostly in identifiable courses where specific knowledge construction takes place as introduction (I), refinement (R), or at the level of demonstrated knowledge (D). Of course, students will "demonstrate" skills and aptitudes throughout their careers at Macalester and will be graded by individual faculty members accordingly. "Demonstrated knowledge" (D) designates here the moment when formal assessment takes place.

**1.** Critical readings of the history of the discipline take place in a number of places in the curriculum, and are finally assessed in the required Theory and Method (Reli 235) course.

**I:** Hebrew Bible (Reli 120), New Testament (Reli 121), Jesus, Dissent, and Desire (Reli 123), Asian Religions (Reli 124), Love and Death (Reli 125), Modern Islam (Reli 102)

**R:** Hindus and Muslims (Reli 233), Dissent, Reform, and Expansion in 16th c. Europe (Reli 244), Contemporary Christian Theory and Practice (Reli 246), Society Worshipping Itself: Durkheim and Religion (Reli 294), Ritual (311), Catholicism (Reli 238); Martyrdom Then and Now (Reli 294), Philosophy of Religion (Reli 248), Atheism Past and Present (Reli 294), The Qur'an (294), Introduction to Jewish Life and Literature (Reli 234), America's Jews, American Judaisms (Reli 294), Jews and Christians: From Diatribe to Dialogue (Reli 294), Christianity in Late Antiquity (Reli 222), Orthodoxy and Heresy in Early Christianity (Reli 223), Christian Identity and Anti-Judaism (Reli 294)

**D:** Theory and Method (Reli 235)

[Here students will either take a comprehensive final exam on the subject matter as a whole or will write a final paper that exhibits one or more methodological approaches and a knowledge of where the approach or approaches fit in history of the discipline. In either case, the purpose is to learn and to use the diversity of assumptions and approaches that theoretically and methodologically define the academic study of Religion as an interdisciplinary discipline. In addition, the course provides opportunities for self-reflection on students' own assumptions and approaches as well as background for further coursework in the major or minor.]

**2.** Students will undertake a variety of writing assignments in the following classes, but a formal assessment of student writing will take place in the senior seminar, where the instructor and one other faculty member will evaluate the cohort of seniors' research writing using a standard rubric (RWR: Research Writing Rubric, see attached).

**I:** Hebrew Bible (Reli 120), New Testament (Reli 121), Jesus, Dissent and Desire (Reli 123); Love and Death (Reli 125); The End of the World (Reli 194); Catholicism (Reli 238), Introduction to Islam (Reli 100), Modern Islam (Reli 102), Introduction to Buddhism (Reli 294), Buddhism and the Supernatural (Reli 294), After the Holocaust (Reli 294), The Jews and Their Messiahs (Reli 294), Jews, Others and the Pursuit of Identity (Reli 294)

**R:** Theory and Method (Reli 235); Dissent, Reform, and Expansion in 16<sup>th</sup> Century Europe (Reli 244), Contemporary Christian Thought and Practice (Reli 246), the Sacred, the Sword, and the Marketplace (Reli 294), Martyrdom, Then and Now (Reli 294), Atheism Past and Present (294), The Qur'an (294), Christianity in Late Antiquity (Reli 222), Orthodoxy and Heresy in Early Christianity (Reli 223), Christian Identity and Anti-Judaism (Reli 294)

**D:** Approaches to the Study of Religion (Reli 469)

[Here students will refine and complete a capstone paper which will be evaluated with the RWR by at least two faculty members.]

**3.** Students will do oral presentations in class in several classes but a formal assessment of oral presentation skills will take place in the senior seminar, where the instructor and at least one other faculty member will evaluate the cohort of seniors' oral communication skills using a standard rubric (OPR: Oral Presentation Rubric).

**I:** Jesus, Dissent, and Desire (Reli 123); Love and Death (Reli 125); The End of the world (Reli 194), Modern Islam (Reli 102), Asian Religions (Reli 124), How To Do Things With Dead People (Reli ###); Orthodoxy and Heresy in Early Christianity (Reli 223), Christian Identity and Anti-Judaism (Reli 294)

**R:** Theory and Method (Reli 235); Catholicism (Reli 238); Dissent Reform and Expansion (Reli 244); Contemporary Christian Thought and practice (Reli 246); The Sacred, the Sword, and the Marketplace (Reli 294); Martyrdom, Then and Now (Reli 294), The Qur'an (Reli 294), Atheism Past and Present (Reli 294), How To Do Things With Dead

People (Reli 294), Ritual (Reli 311), Society Worships Itself (Reli 294), Christianity in Late Antiquity (Reli 222).

**D:** Approaches to the Study of Religion (Reli 469)

[Here students will give an oral presentation of their senior capstone paper, and at least two faculty members will evaluate their oral performance.]

**4.** Students will be required to take courses that cover a variety of religious traditions, at least two, and will be able to discuss the phenomenon of religion in a comparative way by the time they come to the senior seminar. We will assess this ability as a department when we conduct exit interviews with graduating seniors.

**5. Students will be able** to effectively translate the academic study of religion in a variety of professional and personal settings. They will be assessed by a survey of our majors' professions etc five years out.

#### **IV. Assessment**

Assessment is built into all our activities, but is ritually enacted at a few precise moments:

1. Assessment of our students' grasp of the history and nature of the discipline with the final examination or paper in Reli 235: Method and Theory in the Study of Religion.
2. Assessment of our students' ability to write a polished research paper and to give an oral presentation of its main points in the senior seminar (Reli 469: Approaches to the Study of Religion)
3. Assessment of our students' familiarity with multiple religious traditions during the Senior Dialog conducted prior to graduation
4. Assessment of our students' preparedness for their later careers by surveying their activities five years beyond graduation, and by inviting graduates with a variety of post-graduation career paths back to campus to talk with present students.