

**Department of Religion**  
**Outcomes Assessment Plan**

**Desired Outcomes:**

We expect all of our majors to learn about the history, concepts, beliefs, practices, and so on of major religious traditions such as Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Daoism, Hinduism, Judaism (and the religion of the ancient Hebrews), Islam, and Shinto. They are expected to understand how such global religious traditions as these reflect the social contexts in which they emerged, and in turn how the traditions affect and transform those societies. We expect our majors to acquire and to deploy the methods of history, linguistics, philosophy and other humanistic and social science disciplines during their studies, and to learn the languages that are needed for a full grasp of their area of specialization. We also expect our majors to learn how to think and write with sophistication, intelligence, and insight. We expect them to be able to interpret, and analyze difficult texts, including seminal texts in their fields. We expect them to be able to articulate and to defend, with clarity and with insight, a point of view or thesis on matters of significance or controversy in their field of study, and to acquire the vocabulary and intellectual skills to do so. In addition we expect our students to develop an attitude of curiosity and an attitude of appreciation for the traditions and cultures of others. We propose a set of steps that will enable us to assess the achievements of our students in these areas.

The Program has undertaken two extensive reviews of the major curriculum, first in fall of 2003 and again more recently in 2006-2007. These reviews had several aims: 1) to identify changes that might increase the number of majors in Religion; 2) to improve the balance between Western and non-Western areas in the program of study; and 3) to integrate the expertise of faculty added to the Program since the original structure of the major was put in place. In light of our findings the major has been revised significantly.

**Concrete steps we will take:**

**Core Courses** The core courses required of all of our majors include Society and Religion, a 100 level course, and Theories of Religion, a 400 level course. Both of these courses deal to some extent with social scientific approaches to the study of religion. Although there will be exceptions to this pattern, it is to be expected that students will take the 100 level course early in the process of pursuing their major and the upper level course at a later stage. In both of these courses we will give a short diagnostic exam, asking for students to indicate whether they are, or plan to be, majors. The diagnostic exam will address questions of either general knowledge or critical reasoning or the ability to grapple with questions about the social meaning and implications of religious beliefs and practices. The questions may be either multiple choice or short essay answers, depending on the relevant subject matter. We will be particularly interested in the performance of students who have already declared or intend to declare Religious Studies as their major. By assessing the performance of students in two courses with comparable content, but that will generally be taken at two quite different stages in their undergraduate careers, we can assess the development of our students and get a sense of their strengths and weaknesses, including their general level of knowledge and critical reasoning skills. In addition we will acquire a picture of the overall improvement of our majors as they move from introductory to advanced coursework. What we learn will also provide us with an opportunity to remedy any deficiencies that become apparent in the curriculum that the students are pursuing.

**Portfolio of papers** We will invite each of our majors to put together a portfolio of papers that s/he has written for upper level (normally 300-level and 400-level) courses. We will ask our majors for a second copy of such papers and then keep them in a file. It will be explained to the students that this process can benefit them in a variety of ways, such as making it easier for their instructors to write letters of reference

for them in the future. The written consent of the students, in accordance with university requirements, will be required. The papers in the portfolio will be assessed by the Undergraduate Committee in accordance with criteria such as these: Does the student show a command of the relevant body of knowledge? (For example, this might involve knowledge of seminal texts in a particular tradition, or more than one tradition, or knowledge of a particular historical period or of a relevant body of literature.) Does the student exhibit in his/her work the desired qualities that are identified above as “desired outcomes”? The papers will be judged as either: excellent, very good, good, acceptable, or poor, with an appropriate numerical scale; this will permit us to keep track of the performance of our students over a number of years. The results will be shared with faculty and we will discuss together how to remedy deficiencies that become apparent from the quality of the work that the students submit.

**Survey** All undergraduate majors will be required to complete a departmental Senior Survey. The Senior Survey will be developed and, over the course of time, modified and refined by the Department’s Undergraduate Committee. The Survey will ask our graduating majors to give their assessment of what they have learned, what could have been done better, and so on. In addition a formal “exit interview” will be conducted with each student by at least two members of the Undergraduate Committee. We will stay in touch with graduates and draw on their post-graduation sense of what they learned as majors in our Department. We will be particularly eager to hear from them about what they learned, what could have been done better, whether the training they received has served them well, and so on. The plan is to follow up with our majors five years after they have graduated and, again, ten years after they have graduated.

**Process of developing this plan:**

All of the faculty have been involved in defining this process. We started with a series of informal conversations among the faculty. We asked ourselves, in particular, what our ideal graduating student would look like, making this the defining motif for the process. Through these discussions we have developed a list of steps we wished to take. We consulted with existing majors, our most experienced TAs, and others. Then at meetings of the entire faculty we discussed our goals, the proposed steps, the logistics of initiating the process, and so on. Finally, drafts of the document have been circulated to the entire faculty. The result is that this plan is the product of the joint effort of the entire faculty and is the product of our careful reflection about our pedagogical goals.

**Responsibility for implementing this plan:**

The Undergraduate Advisor, in cooperation with the Courses and Curriculum Committee, together take responsibility for implementing this Outcomes Assessment Plan, and are referred to above as the “Undergraduate Committee.” This committee will have the Undergraduate Advisor as its Chair. The Undergraduate Committee is responsible for all assessment of undergraduate majors and for reporting the outcome of this assessment annually, by the last day of classes in each academic year, to the Head of Department. The report will assess the performance of juniors and seniors each year, comparing that performance with results obtained in previous assessments, and comparing seniors and juniors. In light of their findings, the Undergraduate Committee will routinely make recommendations for changes and improvements in undergraduate instruction, advising and curriculum.