# Annual Learning Outcomes Assessment Report
## 2013-2014

### Degree Program Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Degree Program (Major)</th>
<th>Religious Studies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree (BS, BA, BFA, MFA, MBA, etc.)</td>
<td>BA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department/ School</td>
<td>Religious Studies/Wilkinson College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of students currently enrolled (as majors) in the program:</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Contact Person

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Person coordinating program’s assessment effort)</th>
<th>Nancy M. Martin</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Chair and Associate Professor, Religious Studies Dept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail address</td>
<td><a href="mailto:nmartin@chapman.edu">nmartin@chapman.edu</a></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Learning Outcome #1
#### I. Process:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Learning Outcome</th>
<th>Students will synthesize research results and formulate written arguments on topics in religious studies.</th>
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**Supports University Theme** (Some or all of the program’s learning outcomes must support at least two of the university’s strategic themes)
- Themes: Internationalization, Personalized Education, Faculty/Student Research, Interdisciplinarity, or Student Writing
- Describe how the theme is supported by the learning outcome

This outcome supports the university themes of student writing, as well as globalization and interdisciplinarity because the subject matter of religious studies is global in scope and necessarily requires employing the methodologies of multiple disciplines to adequately evaluate phenomena. This outcome also supports personalized education because students select elective courses and capstone projects tailored to their interests and work closely with faculty mentors on their research, including where appropriate faculty/student research collaboration.

**Supports WASC Core Competency** (Please indicate whether this outcome supports any of WASC’s core competencies)
- Oral Communication
- Written communication
- Information Literacy
- Quantitative Reasoning
- Critical Thinking

This outcome supports WASC core competencies in written communication, information literacy and critical thinking. The outcome requires that students do research, and this includes developing information literacy (with an advanced library seminar incorporated into Rel 398 Junior/Senior Seminar). Formulating written arguments on topics in religious studies is the core of the SLO and students are required to engage in critical thinking in the evaluation and synthesizing of research results and formulating their own arguments.

**Where is the outcome published for students?**
- Syllabi (If syllabi, list course numbers)
- Website
- Handbook

This outcome will be published in syllabi for the foundation course Rel 130, for the junior/senior seminar Rel 398, for the capstone project Rel 498, and for all other upper division courses in the department (Rel 303, Rel307, Rel309, Rel310, Rel311, Rel312, Rel314, Rel315, Rel316, Rel319, Rel322, Rel323, Rel324, Rel325, Rel329, Rel330, Rel335, Rel336, Rel340, Rel341, Rel365, Rel365a, Rel380, Rel 490). It is also posted on the department website.

**Evidence of Learning**
- capstone project
- presentation
- performance
- course-embedded exam
- assignment
- standardized test
- portfolio

The principle evidence of learning was drawn from (1) individual capstone research projects (Rel 498); (2) essay(s) from the junior/senior seminar (Rel 398); (3) 3 assignments from two of the three required areas of the major (“Scriptures & Traditions” and “Religion, Ethics and Society”) and (4) a writing sample from the introductory foundation course Rel 130.

**Rel 130: The Study of Religion**
All religious studies majors and minors are required to take this foundation course which introduces them to a wide range of methods in the study of religion, drawing case studies from a range of religious traditions. A writing assignment from this course provides an initial point of comparison to assess student writing as this course is designed to be taken fall semester freshman or sophomore year as one of the student’s first religion courses. However, as the current major requirements were implemented for the first time in the 2011 catalog, not all students graduating this year took this course in the freshman or sophomore years with one taking it in the fall of senior year.

**Junior/Senior Seminar (Rel 398):**
- Seminar course for majors and minors.
- Readings include a range of current books on topics in the study of religion that cover a wide range of religious traditions (SLO 2) and topics relating to religion, ethics and society (SLO 3).
- Students are required to write short argumentative essays on the readings, culminating in a final paper on a topic of their choice integrating the readings (minors) or a revision of the paper of their
choice and an annotated bibliography for their capstone project (majors) (SLO 1). Readings were intentionally very challenging, geared to a first year graduate level, with students required to write 9 papers across the semester, culminating in a final paper (minors) or revision (majors) and annotated bibliography (majors only). This year two of the majors being evaluated took this course as juniors, 3 as seniors.

Capstone Project (Rel 498): This individual research on a topic of the student’s choosing within religious studies culminates in a 20-35 page research paper, done under the guidance of a supervising faculty member of the department (who must be tenured/tenure-track or Dean of the Chapel). The student is expected to demonstrate mastery of SLO 1 in this project. Ideally this project should be completed spring semester of the senior year; however, this year because some students were double majors and required to complete separate capstones for both majors, one student was permitted to complete her Religious Studies capstone in spring of her junior year and and a second completed her capstone in fall of senior year, and thus their projects do not reflect the culmination of their academic learning. In one case, the student wrote her second capstone senior year selecting a topic that bridged religious studies and English and for which she was co-supervised by a religious studies faculty member. This project was also evaluated in order to compare her performance junior vs. senior year and to evaluate whether students should be permitted to do capstone projects junior rather than senior year.

In our newly revised major, students are required to take electives in three areas, and assignments from courses in two of these areas (“Scriptures and Traditions” and “Religion, Ethics and Society”) in previous years were used as evidence of learning for SLO 2 (2 assignments) and SLO 3 (1 assignment). The course assignments could be research papers, essay exams, or alternate essay assignments or research projects as appropriate. Though the department will now not be evaluating SLO2 and SLO 3 until 2015 and 2016 respectively, writing samples from these courses were also evaluated as evidence of learning for SLO 1 as in previous years.

In selecting these additional papers to be evaluated, an effort was also made to select a range of papers across the students’ academic programs, reflecting work wherever possible from different semesters across Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, and Senior years, in order to assessment writing improvement. Furthermore, 3 of the graduating majors also further revised papers written for classes and presented them at an interdisciplinary conference organized by the department (as did a 4th major who is a junior). These papers were also considered in the final assessment of mastery of this SLO.

Student Portfolios: The Religious Studies Department has established a system of electronic portfolios to collect copies of student work from all majors in courses they take for their degree requirements for assessment purposes. These portfolios are maintained on the departmental Blackboard site accessible to tenured/tenure-track faculty and the Dean of the Chapel, and assignments for evaluation were drawn from these portfolios, allowing the department to track individual learning at each step of the program and
progress across each student’s academic career.

Although our current portfolio system was working very effectively, the department has also reviewed the WASC rubric for assessing the effectiveness of student e-portfolios, which addresses portfolios that students (rather than faculty) are responsible for maintaining and that promote student engagement and allow for ongoing student-faculty interaction throughout the student’s program. The department worked with Mary Litch in a campus pilot program to set up this alternate type of e-portfolio and will implement this in 2014-2015.

Collecting and Analyzing the Data

- **How did you select the sample?**
- **What was your sample size (number of students)?**
- **Provide the percentage of the sample size as compared to the relevant population.**
- **How did you assess the student work/data collected?**
- **Possible Tools: rubric, exam questions, portfolio samples**
- **Attach all assessment tools**

Six religious studies majors graduated this year. Five were evaluated. The sixth graduating major shifted from a minor to a major only in the very last semester of senior year and was omitted because no portfolio had been kept but more importantly because personal issues had deeply impacted the student’s performance which had nothing to do with the academic program. Thus 83% of the graduating seniors were evaluated. In order to get a sense of the students’ progress with respect to this SLO, samples were selected from courses representative of at least 3 different years of the students’ academic career.

The department has developed a rubric for this SLO (formerly incorporated within our Capstone Project Assessment Rubric and our Program Assessment Rubric for course-embedded program assessment of all student learning outcomes). All writing samples were evaluated using this SLO 1 Rubric. Capstone projects were scored by the capstone project supervising faculty member (who must be a tenured/tenure-track or Dean of the Chapel) and 2 additional members of the department (tenured/tenure-track faculty and/or the Dean of the Chapel). Writing samples from Rel 130; junior/senior seminar performance and the three additional assignments from the student portfolios were evaluated by three department faculty members (tenured/tenure-track and/or the Dean of the Chapel).

Six faculty members participated in the evaluation of data which included 6 papers from each of the 5 students. The Department Chair coordinated the assessment and evaluated all papers from all students (30 papers). Each of the other faculty members evaluated the six papers from one student and six other papers from the other 4 students. 3 faculty members also evaluated the conference papers delivered by 3 of the majors and the additional capstone project for the major who did two (including the assessment coordinator).

Expected Level of Achievement

- **What was your target(s) for student performance for this outcome? (This should tie to the methods in which you assessed the students and collected and analyzed data in the section above.)**

Students are expected to write a thesis-driven paper with a logical and compelling argument, identifying and incorporating the key primary and secondary sources relating to the assignment or topic, contextualizing and interpreting primary sources; analyzing them comparatively and employing multiple methodologies as appropriate; accurately presenting and evaluating the arguments and assumptions and possible biases of secondary sources, and effectively marshalling supporting evidence to defend their own position or argument, presented in a clear and cogent writing style, with correct punctuation, syntax, word usage and grammar, a well-organized structure, and appropriate modes of citation for sources.

These elements are the hallmarks of a well-written, thesis driven, evidence-based paper, and as such they are the targets for the required research papers.
and/or essays in Rel 130, Rel 398, Rel 498 and all the other upper division courses taught as a part of the Religious Studies major. Some courses are necessarily more comparative in nature (e.g., Rel 330, Rel 380), but students can choose to write comparative term papers in other upper-division courses or to write a paper focused on a single tradition even within these more comparative courses. Some courses also deal more directly with primary sources, such as those courses that focus on the interpretation of the Bible or the Quran (Rel 303, Rel 323, Rel 324, Rel 340, and Rel 341), but again students can choose to focus research papers more heavily on primary texts in other courses as well. In selecting any topic for a research paper, students will be expected to use appropriate primary and secondary sources and methods of analysis. In light of these considerations, we have not assigned specific course numbers to the components but evaluate all writing samples with respect to all these expectations, while recognizing that all may not be applicable to all topics.

Religious Studies courses are designed to promote interreligious literacy for students across the campus as a vital competency for global citizenship in the twenty-first century, and are taken by many non-majors as a part of their general education requirements (for shared inquiry, global study and inter/multidisciplinary clusters) as well as by minors, for areas of emphasis (e.g. in Peace Studies), and as electives. The number of majors, though increasing, is and will continue to be limited. This year we had six graduates (twice as many as last year). Three graduated with departmental honors (though 5 out of 6 qualified with respect to GPA, university policy limits the percentage of majors who can graduate with honors from a given department) and 5 out of 6 were founding members of our new campus chapter of the national honor society in religious studies and theology, Theta Alpha Kappa. Because of the small number of graduating majors, statistical analysis and numerical targets for rubric outcomes are of limited use, with variation between students largely conforming to student GPAs. Further this SLO addresses research & writing which is also promoted across the full curriculum of courses at Chapman. Nevertheless, by evaluating each student’s performance across multiple years for this SLO we can track student research and writing competence in religious studies. Qualitative analysis, particularly in identifying strengths and weaknesses of the program with regard to this SLO has been extremely fruitful however. As the number of majors continues to grow, we will revisit this issue. This year we added six new majors (2 entering freshmen, 1 transfer student, 3 declared) and have 3 entering freshmen majors Fall 2014. Previously the department has not generally had freshman entering already declared as religious studies majors, with most declaring after taking their first course, so this represents a significant addition.