



## 2008-2009 Assessment Plan Report

### PROGRAM ASSESSMENT REPORT AY 2008-2009

**Report Date:** June 1, 2009  
**School/College:** University of San Francisco  
**Department/Program:** Theology and Religious Studies  
**Person completing the Report:** Vincent Pizzuto, Ph.D.

1. **Overview Statement:** Briefly summarize the assessment activities that were undertaken this academic year, indicating:
  - a. which program learning outcomes were assessed this year.

Our department has established three Learning Outcomes for our Majors. In this first of our three-year evaluation we have undertaken to assess the first of our Learning Outcomes, which is states that all of our graduating Majors will be able to demonstrate:

*"An understanding of fundamental issues posed by the world's religious and theological traditions"*

- b. who in your department/program was involved in the assessment of the above learning outcomes

The members of our department most directly involved in the assessment of our Learning Outcomes are as follows:

Myself, Vincent Pizzuto, who was assigned the task of coordinating, collecting and reporting this information. In addition, I was assisted by Lilian Dube (Christian Theology and the Third World), Mark Miller (Catholic Systematic Theology) and Aysha Hidayatullah (Islamic Studies) because of the diverse representation of their field of studies (in both Christian Theology, Multi-Culturalism and Religious Studies). Finally, we are providing an example of a final "Capstone" project by a student in the class of Patrick Lannen, in his "Christian Social Ethics" course.

The department of Theology and Religious Studies serves the University Core (D) as well as a small number of Majors and Minors. As such, it was determined over several departmental meetings which of our faculty currently had Majors enrolled in their classes. Once determined, we decided to choose three faculty members who



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would serve as representatives of our religious, theological and cultural emphases within the department. In addition, we sought ways of collecting and documenting the various forms of evidence we use for evaluation. Among them: written papers/research assignments, exam questions, and our final capstone project which all senior Majors are required to write and present. Each of these samples have been included in the documentation along with this report (please see attached).

### 2. Please Answers the Following Questions for Each of the Student Outcomes Assessed:

#### a. What did you do?

Describe clearly and concisely how you assessed the learning outcomes that were evaluated this year (e.g., measures, research methods, etc.). [please use bullet points to answer this question]

- We assessed the learning outcomes by evaluating student responses at various stages of the degree program;
- We sought to understand through papers and examinations whether the students were grasping the fundamental issues posed by the religious tradition they were studying and the impact its adherents have in the world.
- A specific example of how this question was explored can be seen in the syllabus of Mark Miller, who noted:
  1. Much of the way we live our lives and the way we reflect on our lives is disconnected. On a national level, debates rage about Guantanamo, abortion, and bailouts. On a personal level, we wonder which major to choose, how to spend our money, whom to befriend. Constantly we are called upon to make decisions. And the consequences are enormous. But how do we decide? With the heart or with the mind? Caring about myself or the world? Through science or faith? Experience or authority? Whether we understand them or not, there are reasons for our decisions, reasons that tend to be grounded historically in some school of thought.

This course will be a conversation with each other and with the authors. Our underlying question will be, “What is the best way to live?” The conversation will be conducted in the Jesuit tradition of liberal arts education, and thus with an openness to all questions, a hermeneutics of love, an eye toward service, and an examination of the heart’s deepest desires. Ultimately, the goal is to form more liberated human persons united in a more cooperative, just, and charitable society. Proximately, we shall work to strengthen our skills in critical reading, writing, and discussion.



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This was evaluated through various course requirements. Among them was an assignment of "Seven, one-page papers designed to help the student critically appropriate and present the material."

Thus, for this professor the stated course goal for this assessment was to get students:

(1) to personally appropriate the ethical positions of influential philosophical and theological thinkers and with this knowledge;

(2) to reflect on how and why we make decisions in our lives. To aid them in this learning and to assess it, I had them write one-page summaries of the texts with a focus on the question, "What is the best way to live?"

- The following example is taken from the assessment report of Aysha Hidayatullah:

One of the fundamental tenants of Islam is reverence for and emulation of the Prophet Muhammad's words and deeds (known as the *Sunna*), as transmitted to Muslims through the oral and subsequently written record of the *Hadith*. As a way to understand this core aspect of Islam, students are asked to write a short (500 words) paper in response to the following question:

How does the Prophet Muhammad's *Sunna* function as a source of ethical norms and ideals for Muslims? As part of your answer, include an explanation of how Muslims know the *Sunna* and how they relate to its historical specificity.

Attached are the papers of two students from my Spring 2009 Islamic Feminist Ethics course who are THRS majors.

- And Finally, the following assessment report was submitted by Lilian Dube:

Example of assignment: *Weaving of Stories*

Task: Read the story of 'David and Jane' carefully and answer the following questions based on your knowledge of the transmission and prevention of HIV/AIDS in Chapter 6 of Weeks and Alcamo, 2006 *AIDS: The Biological Basis*



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### *David and Jane's Story*

[Cf. De La Porte A. 2003, "Hopeful Compassion, Spiritual Care for the Person Living with HIV/AIDS" in Dube M. W. *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes*, (133-134).]

David learns that his wife Jane is HIV-positive. He feels he cannot face this, so he thinks about sending her home to her family so that he can go on with his life. He is sure that he is not infected, but he has not had an HIV test. Both David and Jane had post-test counseling and are aware of the fear of rejection. Jane wants him to be tested also. He response by saying that she is only accusing him falsely of being responsible for her infection and refuses. While David is thinking about what to do, they learn that Jane is pregnant with their first child. David now thinks of doing an abortion on Jane, since they have no money to go to a clinic. He is afraid that he might be infected also but cannot talk about his fear to Jane. If he is infected, then David knows that he, too, would die, and aborting Jane's child would mean the family name would die out. He decides to send Jane home to her family without an abortion and find another wife who might also give him a child. Then he would have two chances to leave a son behind. Before he sends Jane away he talks with his friend, wanting his friend to agree that he is doing the right thing.

### **Assessment Questions used for evaluating the first departmental Learning Outcome:**

*"An understanding of fundamental issues posed by the world's religious and theological traditions"*

- a.) If you were David's friend, what key questions would you ask?
- b.) What do you think are some of are David and Jane's dire needs?
- c) If David and Jane were members of your church, what would you do when you learned that Jane had been sent home?
- d) Using the story of David and Jane, discuss key theological arguments surrounding condom-use as a preventive measure.



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**b. What did the faculty in the department or program learn?**

Summarize your findings and conclusions as a result of the assessment indicating strengths and weaknesses in student learning demonstrated by this assessment.

Our department has learned that while our current structure and goals serve the Core very effectively, we feel it is important for us to more systematically structure our Major. Thus, we are confident that students will meet our establish learning outcomes, but are less sure that our program is structured in a way as to ensure that pre-requisites are met before students are introduced to more advanced courses. Part of the problem we face is introduced by our dual role of serving the undergraduate Core as well as our Majors/Minors (of which there are relatively few). Thus, to offer courses only for Majors becomes difficult in terms of securing the numbers we need to make those classes run. Thus, most of our majors take courses along with the other non-majors in courses that also fill the core.

**c. What will be done differently as a result of what was learned?**

Discuss how courses and/or curricula will be changed to improve student learning as a result of the assessment. Include a discussion of how the faculty will help students overcome their weaknesses and improve their strengths.

In our lengthy discussions of this we have agreed to commit to a gradual restructuring of our Major. Our first experimental phase of the restructuring will be to establish an annual Spring semester Major/Minor seminar restricted only to our Majors/Minors. This will provide mandatory classes whereby we can ensure that our Majors (and Minors) are introduced to the necessary Learning Outcomes and foundational methods of their disciplines, as well as have an opportunity to sit in courses that are limited only to those students most interested in this field of study. Our first Major/Minor seminar is slated to be offered in the Spring of 2010. The goal of this first shift is to be accompanied by a concerted effort to build our Major-Minor student body in an effort to introduce a greater number of courses that can be limited to upper division Major interests.

**3. Attach a copy of the components of the department/program assessment plan that have been modified since its initial submission:**

- a. Program Mission
- b. Program Learning Goals
- c. Program Learning Outcomes
- d. Program Learning Rubrics aligned with outcomes
- e. Curriculum map that shows the courses that pertain to the outcome



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### **a) Mission of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies**

The department's courses provide students the opportunity to pursue the study of religion via three major areas: Theology and Spiritualities; Scriptures and Religious Traditions; and Religion, Society and Ethics. The aim of the program is to foster and deepen an engaged, critical, and integrated understanding of the disciplines of Theology and Religious Studies within the University's tradition of Jesuit liberal education.

Students and faculty of Theology and Religious Studies proceed with the conviction that a full understanding of human nature requires attention to fundamental issues posed by the world's religious and theological traditions: the origin and nature of the human search for transcendence; the nature of religious faith and its diverse expressions; the relation between religious vision and morality; the role religious traditions play in culture and society; and the significance of religion in our modern secular world.

Theology and Religious Studies, then, consists of inquiry into the diverse forms and expressions of religious experience. This requires the use of a number of different methods: theological, psychological, historical, philosophical, and comparative.

In light of the University's commitment to the Catholic tradition, the Theology and Religious Studies Department puts special, though not exclusive, emphasis on the Catholic Christian tradition. In light of Vatican II the Department stresses also respectful engagement with other great religious, cultural and philosophical traditions of the world. For this reason the Department maintains a broad perspective in its inquiry into the religious dimension of life.

### **b) Program Learning Goals (Item 'e) Curriculum Map' is imbedded in this section as well)**

The Theology and Religious Studies Department offers courses in three content areas. Each area is listed and described below

#### ***Theology and Spiritualities***

Courses in this area deal with three dimensions of "faith seeking understanding," a phrase that has classically described theology as a discipline. Theology seeks to articulate

- the truth of faith
- ethics, especially regarding the implications of faith in human life and activity
- spirituality, the practice and understanding of the faith experience.

All three dimensions are pursued in dialogue with contemporary culture and society and all three aim specifically to situate particular faith traditions within contemporary approaches to the study of religion.



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### Courses Offered

0128-100	<i>Christian Village</i>	Core D-2
0128-104	<i>Mystery of God</i>	Core D-2
0128-220	<i>Catholic Social Thought</i>	Core D-2
0128-310	<i>Celebrating Sacraments</i>	Core D-2
0128-312	<i>Christian Marriage</i>	Core D-2
0128-322	<i>Liberation Theology</i>	
0128-363	<i>Religion in Latin America &amp; Caribbean</i>	Cultural Diversity
0128-366	<i>Religion Spirituality in Asia</i>	Core D-2
0128-XXX	<i>Christology</i>	Core D-2 [course & core certification in process]
0128-2XX	<i>Church in Crisis: Jesuits in 20<sup>th</sup> Century</i>	[Course certification in process]
0128-2XX	<i>Feminist Theology</i>	[Course development in process]

### Scriptures & Tradition

Courses in this area focus on the sacred scriptures of the major religious traditions of the world such as the Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, Confucian, and Muslim traditions. The courses examine the historical and cultural backgrounds of these texts and gauge the way that beliefs developed in ancient times. They also look at the ways ideas about these ancient texts have changed over time and influence people's lives today.

0128-116	<i>Origins: Judaism &amp; Christianity</i>	
0128-202	<i>Introduction to New Testament</i>	Core D-2
0128-2XX	<i>Advocacy Exegesis</i>	[Course development in process]
0128-330	<i>Biblical and Spiritual Drama</i>	Core F
0128-367	<i>Daoism &amp; Chinese Culture</i>	
0128-368	<i>Japanese Religions</i>	
0128-370	<i>Zen Buddhism</i>	
0128-371	<i>Hinduism</i>	Core D-2 [certification in process]
0128-372	<i>Jewish—Christian Relationship</i>	Core D-2
0128-373	<i>Introduction to Islam</i>	Core D-2 [certification in process]
0128-376	<i>Introduction to Judaism</i>	Core D-2

### Religion, Society and Ethics

Religion, society and ethics can be studied from the inside, in terms of its scriptures, beliefs, ethical and moral systems of thought as well as concrete practices, but also can be studied as a









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Classes are grouped within specific thematic areas, allowing both majors and minors a wide range of options in designing a course of study. The program will provide...

- an understanding of fundamental issues posed by the world's religious and theological traditions;
- inquiry into the diverse forms and expressions of religious experience;
- emphasis on the Catholic Christian tradition as well as respectful engagement with other religious, cultural, theological, and philosophical traditions of the world.

### **d) Program Learning Rubrics aligned with outcome**

#### **Goal 1: An understanding of fundamental issues posed by the world's religious and theological traditions**

##### *Outcomes and Rubrics:*

1. Students will examine specific religious traditions and their impact on the modern world vis-à-vis other world religions, culture and politics.
  - a) Below expectations: Students are unable to distinguish the major tenets of the world's major religious traditions or are unable to identify their founders, historical contexts, primary rituals, canonical texts, foundational beliefs or main organizing structures.
  - b) Minimally acceptable: Students are able to distinguish major world religions and their unique characteristics.
  - c) Exemplary: Students are able to understand the interrelationships between major world religions and their individual and collective historical significance on the cultures in which they have come into contact. They are able to articulate a sympathetic and intelligent understanding of the major tenets of the world's major religious traditions and are unable to identify their founders, historical contexts, primary rituals, canonical texts, foundational beliefs and main organizing structures.

*Measurement*: Class papers, in-class presentations, examinations and the Capstone project required of all seniors.

*Time Frame*: within each course (per semester) and overall by the culmination of their four years in the program (i.e., as demonstrated in the capstone).

*Who Assesses*: Professor of various course or capstone.

*How data will be used to improve program or revise curricula*

The teacher will discuss with the Chair and department whether the overall goals can be positively demonstrated throughout the four year program.

### **STUDENT EXAMPLES IN RESPONSE TO DEPARTMENTAL GOAL ONE**

*Attached to Email*



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**Please return to: Provost Office by June 1, 2009**

**You can send your replies as either a Word attachment (to: [marin@usfca.edu](mailto:marin@usfca.edu)) or as a hard copy to: Provost Office, Lone Mountain Rossi Wing 4<sup>th</sup> floor.**

**If you have any questions, please contact: William Murry, Director of Institutional Assessment ([wmurry@usfca.edu](mailto:wmurry@usfca.edu) or x5486).**