

## **Outcomes Assessment Annual Plan**

**Name of Program:** Religious Studies Program

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**Person Completing Assessment Plan:** Sharon L. Coggan

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### **Program's Educational Goals and Objectives:**

This Program draws together the University's resources across many disciplines to offer a Minor in the area of Religious Studies. The Program is designed to foster a nuanced, in-depth understanding of religious phenomena across diverse cultures, through history and in the contemporary world, and to cultivate critical thinking skills in the discipline of Religious Studies. One need only consider the kind of flashpoint religion has become across a range of issues in society throughout the world, to appreciate the need for careful, critical study of religious phenomena.

### **Student Learning Outcomes:**

Once a student has graduated with a Minor in Religious Studies he or she should be able to demonstrate knowledge and skills as summarized in these specific Learning Outcomes:

1. Students must be able to identify a broad range of religious references in cultural, historical, artistic and literary contexts of both the Western and non-Western worlds – to demonstrate a “religious literacy” including a basic “Biblical literacy.”
2. Students must be able to name basic beliefs, practices and interactions with specific cultures of the world's major religious traditions, Western, Eastern and Indigenous.
3. Students must be able to explain the importance of issues associated with religious and cultural diversity, and the role played by religion in producing the tapestry of cultural and religious backgrounds in diverse populations of the world.
4. Students must be able to explain how religion is studied as an academic subject in modern, secular universities and of the ways in which this approach to religion differs from faith-oriented perspectives.
5. Students must be able to apply critical thinking, which is particularly difficult, yet crucial, to the subject of religion.

## **Assessment Method:**

To assess whether students have learned the targeted knowledge and skills, we plan to conduct Entrance and Exit Quizzes to check the level of knowledge and skills at the beginning of the students' education in Religious Studies and at the end, to determine precisely whether we have been successful in meeting our educational goals.

We plan to administer the Entrance Quiz at the beginning of each semester's introductory-level courses, RLST 1610 Introduction to Religious Studies, and RLST 2660 World Religions, at least one section of which is offered each semester. Since students in lower-division courses are typically freshmen, sophomores and many transfer students, they are not always sure at that point of their Major and Minor. For this reason, we plan to simply administer the Entrance Quiz to all students in all sections of these two classes. Following this method, the number of students sampled for the Entrance Quiz would average up to 100 students.

The Quiz will entail short answers to specific questions, that is, a few sentences to identify targeted information or demonstrate skills. The Quizzes will encompass five sections, each of which is designed to correspond precisely with each of the five stated Learning Outcomes. A sample of the Entrance and Exit Quizzes is submitted along with this report. For now one reader, the Program Director, will grade the quizzes, though we could easily expand this in the future to include multiple readers. This sample includes a total of 40 questions. However, asking all 40 questions each semester is too unwieldy, so this list should be considered as a bank or reservoir of potential questions. We will select a different group of 6-10 questions from this master list to administer semester by semester representing one or two Learning Outcomes at a time.

Since our Program currently offers only the Minor, we do not as yet have any kind of capstone course that would offer a prime opportunity to assess our Minors. We plan for now to administer the Exit Quiz at the end of each semester in whatever 4000-level courses we are offering that semester. In the case of the Exit Quiz, we want to be able to track our Minors to discover the extent to which they have acquired the requisite knowledge and skills from the point at which they entered until their completion of the Program. The sampling here will be smaller of course, possibly 25 students. We can also plan to administer the Exit Quiz to those students completing their Individually Structured Majors when one of their declared fields is Religious Studies. The Entrance Quiz will be administered during a portion of one class period, the Exit Quiz after the Minors have completed their final exams during exam week. Scores earned on these Quizzes will not be applied to students' grades for those particular courses.

The answers to Quiz questions themselves will be assessed directly, in accordance with appropriate rubrics developed for each question asked. The student's answer will have to meet a basic level of completeness for full credit. As an example, if the question is: "Who was Buddha?" and the answer reads only: "Founder of Buddhism," it will not be considered an adequate reply, because incomplete. Full credit would be earned by replying: "Prince," or "Religious figure in ancient India who is believed by followers to

have ‘reached enlightenment,’ and founded the religion of Buddhism in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.”

Since Spring Semester 2009 marks the inaugural assessment of our Minor, we cannot cite earlier plans to provide an indication of the level of effectiveness of this model. But judging by the degree of preparation in the subject as evidenced in student responses in current lower-division courses, we fully expect to find an embarrassingly low level of knowledge and skills in Religious Studies on the Entrance Quizzes. Of course we expect to see much higher scores by the time the Minors have made it through the Program. Our success will be measured by the degree of improvement the students show between the Entrance and Exit Quizzes, rather than the specific scores earned. For this reason, the Exit Quiz questions will be the same ones asked on the Entrance Quiz for that cycle. The degree to which our sampling of students has improved, and has learned the required knowledge and skills will form the centerpiece of our “Results” assessment report to be submitted in June.

### **Use of Information: Feedback Loop:**

The scoring of the Quizzes and assessment of the percentage of improvement in scores between the Entrance and the Exit Quiz will be carried out by the Program Director and submitted to the Associate Dean of CLAS, Dr. Tammy Stone to report to CLAS Dean Daniel Howard, and to Dr. Kenneth Wolff, the College’s Outcomes Assessment Representative. The findings will be discussed by Religious Studies faculty at bi-annual meetings. We will be able to see by the questions on which the students do most poorly, where to direct our efforts to improve. We will want to adjust the information-base presented in our courses accordingly, and we may find it beneficial to adjust or add specific assignments to engage our targeted knowledge and skill outcomes. For instance, if the Exit Quizzes show that students are not as familiar as we’d like them to be with Indigenous religious forms, or Biblical references and so on, we would want to schedule more courses in those areas where the students appear deficient, embed more information on these areas in existing course material, and so on. The effectiveness of the measures undertaken as part of the “feedback loop” will be periodically reviewed in the bi-annual meetings where revisions will be instituted as needed, to “close the feedback loop.”

Judging by how well our Minors have tended to “take to” the rigors of the academic study of religion, and by their frequent reports of how much they feel they got out of our Program, we expect the level of improvement between the Entrance and the Exit Quizzes to be considerable. Periodic feedback on the effectiveness of our Program will prove quite valuable to us on many fronts, especially as we move toward producing our proposal to offer the Major in the future.

What follows here is, first, the master list of potential questions, which will also be reviewed periodically, and secondly, a copy of the actual Quiz we will be administering in Spring 2009. This semester we will be assessing only Learning Outcomes I and II.

**Entrance and Exit Quizzes  
Master List of Questions  
Religious Studies Program**

**Provide direct answers to the following. List historical and cultural context for each question and cite any relevant dates and places. It is understood that many questions require extensive in-depth answers, but here you are expected to simply name key points in a few sentences**

**Section I:** These questions are designed to assess how well students are meeting Learning Outcome #1: Students must identify a broad range of religious references in cultural, historical, artistic and literary contexts of both the Western and non-Western worlds – to demonstrate a “religious literacy” including a basic “Biblical literacy.” (Ten potential questions)

1. In what text are the Ten Commandments originally to be found? What culture produced them?
2. What is the “Torah?” In what text is it found? What culture produced this? When and where? How do they view it?
3. Who were the Prophets of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament)? What was their core teaching?
4. What texts are in the New Testament? List as many as you can by title.
5. What is the Qur’an (Koran)? What culture produced it? When and where? How did they view it?
6. Who is Krishna? Identify the religious and cultural source.
7. What is Yoga? What is its purpose? Identify the religious and cultural source.
8. What are the “Four Noble Truths?” Identify the religious and cultural source.
9. Who was Confucius? What are his core teachings? To what culture and era did he belong?
10. What is Taoism? Who founded it, when and where? Can you list its core teachings?

**Section II:** These questions are designed to assess how well students are meeting **Learning Outcome #2:** Students must name basic beliefs, practices of the world’s major religious traditions, Western, Eastern and Indigenous. (Ten potential questions)

1. What is “Shamanism?” Name its core elements. Practiced by whom? When?
2. What is “Paganism?” What are its origins and core elements? Practiced by whom? When?
3. Who were the Patriarchs of the Jewish tradition? Who was Moses? Name the eras when they lived and major events in which they were involved.
4. Who was Zoroaster/Zarathustra? When and where did he live? What were his core teachings?

5. What were some of the historical influences on Christianity? Who founded it? What sort of figure was he, what is he believed to be by Christians?
6. Who were the Church Fathers and what did they do?
7. Who founded Islam? What sort of figure was he, what is he believed to be by Muslims?
8. Who was Buddha? What sort of figure was he, what is he believed to be by Buddhists?
9. Name the major religious/philosophical traditions that originated in China and Japan and their founders.
10. Name some of the “Founding Fathers” of the American nation. What was their prevailing religious belief and what were its basic teachings?

**Section III:** These questions are designed to assess how well students are meeting **Learning Outcome #3:** Students must explain the importance of issues associated with religious and cultural diversity, and recognize the role played by religion in producing the tapestry of cultural and religious backgrounds in diverse populations of the world. (Five possible questions)

1. What religious minority groups in Western society can you name?
2. What is “Multiculturalism” as an ideology? How does it apply to religion?
3. How do some religious theologies view members of other religions? What impact does this have on the issue of religious pluralism?
4. What role has religion played in political issues and current events in the contemporary world?
5. How might you go about developing a sensitivity to what it means to be a person of a minority religious tradition?

**Section IV:** These questions are designed to assess how well students are meeting **Learning Outcome #4:** Students must be able to explain how religion is studied as an academic subject in modern, secular universities and of the ways in which this approach to religion differs from faith-oriented perspectives. (Five possible questions)

1. List some of the various dimensions of religion. Academics from what fields study what aspects of religion?
2. What is “Secular Humanism” in the context of Religious Studies? How does this methodology view religious traditions and texts?
3. How is the subject of religion approached in a secular academic institution and how is this different from faith-oriented approaches?
4. Can you recognize why a secular academic program in religion cannot view religious traditions in the same way that faith approaches do?
5. What sorts of career paths might a Minor in Religious Studies from a secular university lead to?

**Section V:** These questions are designed to assess how well students are meeting Learning Outcome #5: Students must apply critical thinking to the subject of religion. (Ten possible questions)

1. How does academic study of religion differ from advocacy?
2. How would a critical approach to religion differ from uncritical acceptance?
3. How does the “critical-historical” school view the Bible, Qur’an and other religious texts?
4. Name a few of the assumptions or presuppositions on which specific religious beliefs rest.
5. List a few potential points of critique of specific religious beliefs.
6. What might constitute “evidence” for specific religious claims?
7. How are the criteria for judging the validity of specific religious claims to be determined?
8. What is an assertion and how is this different from an argument?
9. What is an ontological claim and how can it be supported?
10. Describe your view of the value of being challenged and of the role of doubt on the subject of religious belief.

### **Additional Questions for Graduating Minors Only**

The purpose of this questionnaire is for us to learn about your educational experience as a Religious Studies Minor. Your comments will help us to assess the efficacy of our Program and will help to enhance it. We value your input and thank you for your participation in our Program. It has been our privilege to host you.

1. What is your Major?
2. How many classes in Religious Studies have you taken at UCD?
3. How would you assess your level of improvement from your first Religious Studies class until now?
4. What are your career goals upon graduating?
5. How much do you think your education in Religious Studies from UCD will help you in realizing those goals?
6. What aspects of the Program in Religious Studies did you find most difficult?
7. What aspects of the Program did you find most enjoyable and most beneficial?
8. Would you list specific instructors in the Program who had an impact on you? How would you describe that impact?
9. What improvements to the Religious Studies Program would you most like to see?
10. How would you rate your overall academic experience in the Religious Studies Program?

## **Entrance Quiz**

### **Religious Studies Program**

This Quiz is being used as a tool for the Religious Studies Program to assess how well our students are learning the material we are presenting. It will be scored, but that score will not be applied to your grade in any specific course. It will never impact your grades in any way.

Please provide direct answers to the questions. Answer as fully as you can. If you really don't know an answer, don't worry, this is part of the knowledge we are working to provide you with as you continue in the RLST curriculum. List historical and cultural contexts for each question and cite any relevant dates and places. It is understood that many questions require extensive in-depth answers, but here you are expected to simply name key points in a sentence or two. Please confine each answer to the lines provided on the Quiz. Answers will be assessed on a 4-point basis. Points will be lost as details of the complete and correct answer are lacking.

If you are an online student, please do not attempt to research the answers to any questions on the Internet. We need to get an accurate view of what you know about religion in your own mind currently, as you begin our Program. Send your completed Quiz to: [Sharon.coggan@ucdenver.edu](mailto:Sharon.coggan@ucdenver.edu) or if you prefer you can print it out, write out your answers and send them by Campus Mail to Dr. Sharon Coggan, Campus Box 179, or put it in her mailbox in Plaza Bldg. M108.

We thank you for your participation in this exercise and hope that you enjoy and benefit from your education in RLST at UCD.

What is your year in school? \_\_\_\_\_  
(Freshman, etc.)

Please name your intended major \_\_\_\_\_  
(or say "Undecided")

Please indicate if you are or might minor in RLST \_\_\_\_\_

If not, please list your possible minor(s) \_\_\_\_\_

**Section I:** These questions are designed to assess how well students can identify a broad range of religious references, to demonstrate “religious literacy” including a basic “Biblical literacy.”

1. What is the “Torah?” In what text is it found? What culture produced this? When and where? How do they view it?

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2. What is the Qur’an (Koran)? What culture produced it? When and where? How do they view it?

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3. What are the “Four Noble Truths?” Identify the religious and cultural source.

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**Section II:** These questions are designed to assess students' knowledge of basic beliefs and practices of the world's major religious traditions.

1. Who were the Patriarchs of the Jewish tradition? When did they live? Who was Moses? When did he live and in what major events was he involved?

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2. What were some of the historical influences on Christianity? Who founded it? What sort of figure was he, what is he believed to be by Christians?

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3. Who was Buddha? What sort of figure was he, what is he believed to be by Buddhists?

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