

Five-Year Assessment and Review
Religion Division
Seaver College, Pepperdine University
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Program Overview

History and Mission

The General Education courses in Religion (REL 101, REL 102, REL 301) and the courses of the Religion major, minors, and various graduate programs directly support the mission of Pepperdine University to be “a Christian university committed to the highest standards of academic excellence and Christian values, where students are strengthened for lives of purpose, service, and leadership.” The three required GE courses acquaint students with the Old and New Testaments and the dynamics of Christianity’s interaction with various aspects of culture. Degree programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels bring students together with accomplished Christian scholars and teachers to study scripture, Christian history, Christian thought and ethics, and practical theology in a context of both academic rigor and faith. These degree programs train ministers, missionaries, teachers, counselors, and others who provide leadership in the church and in Christian-oriented service organizations around the globe. They also prepare students for further study in graduate and professional schools.

From the beginning of the University in 1937, the B.A. in Religion has been the cornerstone of Pepperdine’s commitment to prepare ministers and other church leaders. In 1944 Pepperdine became the first college affiliated with Churches of Christ to offer graduate study in Religion. To the M.A. degree that was initiated at that time and has continued down to the present, an M.S. was added in 1988. In 1989 the M.Div. program was launched. With some modifications these three graduate degree programs remain intact today: the M.Div., a three-year professional degree analogous to the seminary degree required for ordination in most denominations; the M.S., a less comprehensive professional degree that can be completed in about half the time as the M.Div. and does not require the Biblical languages; and the M.A., which offers more specialized training in a particular area of Religious studies and requires a thesis. In 2004 the Seaver Religion Division launched a joint J.D./M.Div. program in conjunction with the Pepperdine School of Law. This program allows students to complete both degrees in five years instead of the six years normally required to complete the two degrees independently. In 2008 the Division launched a joint program with the Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution at the Pepperdine School of Law that enables students to earn both an M.S. in ministry and a Certificate in Dispute Resolution with only four more units than the traditional M.S. requires.

For many years the Division offered an off-campus M.S. program to provide training for ministers and others whose current roles and locations made it impossible for them to pursue a traditional residential graduate degree. This program involved nine courses taken over a period of two academic years in selected locations, followed by comprehensive exams. The program was suspended in 2008 due to budget challenges and the extra demands it placed on human resources that were more urgently needed on the Malibu campus. The current plan is to re-develop the program as soon as it is economically feasible, utilizing a hybrid model of course delivery (part face-to-face lecture, part online instruction).

The most significant curricular change in the undergraduate offerings since the opening of the Malibu campus was implemented 1988-89, when the Division replaced the requirement of two four-unit GE courses (one on the Bible and a Religion “Seminar”) with three required courses of three units each (REL 101 – History and Religion of Israel, REL 102 – History and Religion of Early Christianity, and REL 301 – Religion and Culture [the latter was changed to “Christianity and Culture” in 2002]). Requirements for the Religion major and minors have also undergone periodic adjustments, but these have been less drastic.

Degree Requirements

The B.A. in Religion currently requires 45 units, including 39 upper-division units. In addition to the 9 units of GE Religion credit required of all Seaver students, Religion majors must take REL 302 (Introduction to Biblical Interpretation), REL 330 (History of Christianity), REL 346 (Task of Ministry), REL 526 (The Christian Faith), REL 497 (Senior Seminar), one course in Old Testament, one course in New Testament, and two additional Religion courses. The Religion minor consists of the three required GE courses in Religion and four additional upper-level courses, one each from Scripture, Christian History, Christian Thought, and Practical Theology. The minor in Vocational Ministry consists of the three required GE courses in Religion and REL 302 (Introduction to Biblical Interpretation), REL 330 (History of Christianity), REL 530 (Career as Vocation and Ministry), REL 572 (Urban Ministry and Missions), and one additional Religion course.

The Master of Arts in Religion is a 34-unit degree that requires REL 502 (Introduction to Biblical Interpretation), 20 units in an area of specialization (Old Testament, New Testament, Christian History, Christian Thought, or Practical Theology), 4 elective units in an area other than the specialization, and a 6-unit thesis.

The Master of Divinity degree is a professional degree of 78 units plus three semesters each of Old Testament Hebrew and New Testament Greek. The course requirements are REL 502 (Introduction to Biblical Interpretation), 8 units in Old Testament, 8 units in New Testament, 16 units in Practical Theology, 6 units of fieldwork in three different areas, 12 units in Christian History, 12 units in Christian Thought, and 12 elective units, followed by comprehensive examinations.

The Master of Science in Ministry is a 36-unit non-thesis master's degree that requires 12 units in Scripture (including REL 502 [Introduction to Biblical Interpretation], an Old Testament course, and a New Testament course), 12 units in Practical Theology (including 646 [Theology of Ministry]), and 12 units in Christian History and Christian Thought, followed by comprehensive examinations.

Note: Course offerings in the area of Practical Theology (formerly Ministry/Missions) are currently undergoing revision. Several changes will take effect in the 2015-16 academic year. These revisions are due partly to a change of personnel and partly to changes in the field. (See *Appendix C*)

First, there has been a change in taxonomy in the field, as most seminaries and religious studies programs now use the language of “practical theology” to refer to academic studies in ministry. Thus, the title for this area of instruction has become “Practical Theology/Ministry.”

Second, the personnel change involved the retirement of Dr. Stuart Love in 2012 and the subsequent hire of Dr. David Lemley as his successor. With the departure of Dr. Love and the prior retirement of Dr. Clarence Hibbs from the Social Science Division, we have had no one to teach courses in the area of pastoral counseling/marriage and family therapy. The sense of the current practical theology faculty is that those areas have been taken out of the hands of most ministers and given over to individuals with advanced degrees in counseling. Most ministers now refer their congregants to these professionals. Similarly, we refer any students that might be interested in graduate training in counseling to enter counseling programs that specialize in pastoral counseling.

Third, Dr. Lemley's areas of specialization are Christian worship and spiritual growth. He has developed two courses reflecting those emphases, and he will begin offering them instead of two courses that had been taught solely by Dr. Love. The overall result is that two of the eight ministry course offerings will change completely by Fall 2015, and the other six will be revised in name, number, and/or description.

Relationship between Studies in Religion and Other Programs and Majors

Religion courses are an important venue for exploring the integration of faith and learning that is a hallmark of Seaver College. More broadly, understanding the religious component of human culture has taken on increasing significance for all students because of national and world events of the recent past. (The specific alignment between the learning outcomes of the various degree programs in Religion and the Seaver College institutional learning outcomes is laid out below under “Program Objectives and Learning Outcomes.”) Majors in Political Science, History, International Business, Public Relations, Art History, English, International Studies, Psychology, and Sociology, among others, often take Religion courses beyond the three required GE courses, because they recognize the significance of religious knowledge to their chosen career. Some add Religion as a minor or a second major. The critical thinking skills learned in Religion courses serve students well in all disciplines.

Two developments deserve particular note. One is that in recent years there has been a close correlation at Seaver between the Christian Thought curriculum of the Religion degree programs and the research focus of courses in Seaver's Philosophy program. The latter places Philosophy of Religion as the hub around which other areas of philosophy are taught. Over the past five years, 45 students graduated with degrees in both Religion and Philosophy (26 were double majors, 5 were Religion majors who earned a minor in Philosophy, and 14 were Philosophy majors who earned a minor in Religion). This constituted 57% of the undergraduate Religion majors and 50% of the undergraduate Religion minors. Following two years of conversation, and with the support of Rick Marrs, Dean of Seaver College, the two programs submitted a proposal (Fall 2014) to move the Philosophy program out of the Humanities/Teacher Education Division and into the same division as Religion. With the expected approval of the proposal, we will become the Division of Religion and Philosophy beginning Fall 2015.

A second and less visible change has been the development of a new first-year seminar course by Dr. Ron Cox. The seminar utilizes ancient coins from the collection of retired Prof. John Wilson. The coins provide the student in the seminar with a window into the world of the classical Middle East (200 BC – 200 AD). They are required to use equipment that Dr. Cox has acquired (see under "Resources" below) to produce high-resolution images of the coins. They then conduct research on the historical backgrounds, iconography and inscriptions on the coins. Students interested in religion, political science, art history, humanities, and other fields say that they benefit from the course. The results of their research have been made available to the rest of Seaver through poster presentations at the end of the semester the past two fall terms. The results have been very positive, with students remarking about an increased appreciation of the history, religion, economics, politics, and general social aspects of the Biblical world.

Our newest initiative involves the cooperative efforts of Religion, Political Science, Natural Science, and Business. Dr. Chris Doran has taught a REL 301 course for several years on ecology and environmental sustainability, which brings together his training in Natural Science and Theology. His efforts are now bearing more fruit in the curriculum, as the Seaver and University Academic Councils have given their approvals for an inter-disciplinary minor degree in sustainability, which Dr. Doran developed and will coordinate.

Enrollment

The total number of students enrolled in Religion courses and the course credit hours delivered by the Religion Division each year from Fall 2009 through Spring 2015 are presented in a spread sheet in *Appendix A* ("Class Enrollments: Religion"). A color chart compares the annual totals through 2014 (since the Summer 2015 figures are not yet available). The total number of students enrolled in GE courses has stayed relatively constant, with a slight increase attributable to increased overall enrollment at Seaver. One positive trend is in the number of students taking REL 301, which has increased by approximately 20% over the past five years. This number outpaces the overall Seaver enrollment increases for the same period of time. Students have several alternative courses from which to choose that substitute for the REL 301 requirement (e.g., the Great Books or Social Action and Justice [SAAJ] programs, PHIL 527), so the fact that more are opting for REL 301 reflects the strength of the REL 301 classes.

As a snapshot of class size, the following chart gives the enrollment averages, semester by semester, from the past six academic years. In nine of the twelve Fall/Spring semesters, we have offered REL 101 in Elkins Auditorium. The average class size in those seven sections was 228. The averages for REL 101 classes here exclude the students in Elkins:

Average Class Sizes

	<u>F'09</u>	<u>Sp'10</u>	<u>Smr'10</u>	<u>F'10</u>	<u>Sp'11</u>	<u>Smr'11</u>	<u>F'11</u>	<u>Sp'12</u>	<u>Smr'12</u>
REL 101	46	46	21	47	51	31	44	46	21
REL 102	39	39	24	35	43	29	35	37	21
REL 301	22	23	15	18	15	25	27	19	22
Upper Division Courses									
	13	18	9	15	17	7	13	20	5
	<u>F'12</u>	<u>Sp'13</u>	<u>Smr'13</u>	<u>F'13</u>	<u>Sp'14</u>	<u>Smr'14</u>	<u>F'14</u>	<u>Sp'15</u>	<u>Smr'15</u>
REL 101	41	49	30	44	41	15	45	45	n/a
REL 102	36	40	27	42	45	24	41	40	n/a
REL 301	23	20	20	26	22	18	24	23	n/a
Upper Division Courses									
	8	14	10	13	12	10	16	11	n/a

The data demonstrate that the vast majority of students receiving instruction from the Religion faculty do so through GE classes. Over the past five years more than 88% of the students we have taught were in REL 101, REL 102, REL 301, or GSRE 199 (our first-year seminars). Approximately 25% of those who take an upper division Religion class are enrolled in REL 526 (Religions of the World), which any Seaver student can take to fulfill the non-Western requirement of the GE program. Furthermore, the number of enrolled students indicated for upper division Religion courses includes a few graduate students in almost every case. (The time required to disaggregate those numbers is disproportionate to the benefits that would be gleaned from the information.) It is clear that less than 10% of the undergraduate students with whom we interact in Religion classes are Religion majors and minors enrolled in courses designed specifically for them.

There has been a noticeable decrease in the numbers of students taking upper division Religion courses over the past five years, which reflects a decrease in the number of Religion majors and minors. These numbers are consistent with a recent national decline in the number of students

enrolled in seminaries and graduate Religion / Divinity degree programs. At all levels anecdotal evidence suggests that this primarily reflects financial considerations, probably fueled by the major economic downturn that began at the end of 2008. (The lowest number in our own figures came in the 2012-2013 academic year, precisely four years after the economic crisis began.) There is a general sense that it is difficult to find jobs in ministry or para-church organizations that will enable graduates to support themselves financially while repaying their education loans, and so several students that might be interested in ministry-oriented professions choose something else for “practical” reasons.

The number of B.A. degrees in Religion awarded from Fall 2010 to the present is shown in the following table:

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
B.A.	14	14	6	10	5

The number of graduate degrees in Religion awarded from Fall 2009 to the present is shown in the following table:

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
M.Div.	1	1	3	2	3
M.S.	1	2	2	0	0
M.A.	1	1	1	0	2

See *Appendix B* (“Religion Division Graduates”).

Assessment Activities (2009-2014)

2010 Five-Year Report

The following is a summary of the conclusions and challenges that were drawn from the Five-Year Program Report submitted in May 2010:

1. [The primary weakness observed] is that the Religion Division does not prepare students as well for ministry as for graduate school.
2. The other large challenge . . . is to bring class size down, especially in REL 101 (faculty-student ratio 1:56.8 in REL 101 in 2009-10; and 1:38.9 in REL 102 for the same period). *Proposed Remedy: an additional tenure-track faculty member in Old Testament.*
3. We need to develop measures for assessing the learning outcomes of our undergraduate majors comparable to what the M.S. and M.Div. comprehensive exams and the M.A. thesis defense provide for our graduate students. *Proposed Remedy: develop a capstone course for the B.A. in Religion.*

4. We need to formalize a more structured assessment cycle that addresses the program objectives and learning outcomes over a period of several years.
5. We need to continue to strengthen our library holdings.

Responses to 2010 Conclusions and Challenges

The following activities have directly addressed the five “conclusions and challenges” mentioned in the 2010 Five-Year Program Report:

1. Following the retirement of Dr. Stuart Love in 2011, the Religion Division hired Dr. David Lemley to teach in the area of Ministry and Missions. During the Fall of 2014, Drs. Rodriguez and Lemley developed a revision and realignment of the course offerings in this area. Their proposal has now been approved by the Seaver Academic Council and the University Academic Council, and we will implement the recommended changes beginning in the 2015-2016 academic year. (See **Appendix C** [“Summary of Curriculum Changes”])
2. Despite the hiring of Dr. Danny Mathews in 2011 to teach courses in Old Testament, the problem of a high student-faculty ratio persists in REL 101. As the chart on Page 5 illustrates, the average class size for REL 101 over the past six years (Fall and Spring semesters) remains higher than 45 students per section, and this does not include sections taught in Elkins Auditorium. If we count all students in REL 101 (5342) and count classes in Elkins Auditorium as two sections each, the average class size jumps to 58.7 students per section, an average increase of two students per section.
3. A capstone course (REL 497) was approved during the 2013-2014 academic year. It will be offered for the first time in the Spring 2016 semester.
4. We have conducted several assessments of parts of the undergraduate program over the past five years. Summaries of these activities are provided below.
5. We have not addressed the issue of library holdings systematically, but various faculty have worked individually with the library staff to improve holdings in specific areas. As but one example, Dr. Heard shared this during an e-mail exchange on January 25, 2015 among REL 101 instructors and the library staff:

For a long time now, I have had the practice of going through new catalogs, checking to see whether we already have interesting new items, and then putting items I want us to acquire on a “wish list” within the WorldCat system. Melissa [Nykanen] and now Jeremy [Whitt] all know about my lists (I keep two — one high priority and one secondary) and check them from time to time to order new books.

I have not systematically gone through older publications to make sure we have standards in the field, however.

Chris

Resources

Faculty

The thirteen full-time, tenured or tenure-track faculty are as follows. Only the terminal degrees are shown here. The *curriculum vitae* for each, with other educational information, publication records, etc., is included on the assessment website.

Raymond C. Carr (Ph.D., Graduate Theological Union)
Randall D. Chesnutt (Ph.D., Duke University)
Ronald R. Cox (Ph.D., University of Notre Dame)
Dyron B. Daugherty (Ph.D., University of Calgary)
Kindalee P. DeLong (Ph.D. University of Notre Dame)
Christopher D. Doran (Ph.D., Graduate Theological Union)
R. Christopher Heard (Ph.D., Southern Methodist University)
Ronald C. Highfield (Ph.D., Rice University)
Ira J. Jolivet, Jr. (Ph.D., Baylor University)
David Lemley (Ph.D., Fuller Theological Seminary)
Christina Littlefield-Eng (Ph.D., Cambridge University)*
R. Danny Mathews (Ph.D., Union Theological Seminary)
Daniel A. Rodriguez, (Ph.D., Fuller Theological Seminary)
Timothy M. Willis (Ph.D., Harvard University)

**Dr. Littlefield holds a joint position in Religion and Journalism. She splits her time and responsibilities evenly between the Religion and Communication Divisions.*

We currently have one full-time visiting faculty member on temporary appointment, who fulfills teaching responsibilities in the Religion Division and administrative responsibilities in the Center for Faith and Learning. His full *curriculum vitae* is provided on the assessment website.

John Barton (Ph.D., Makerere University [Kampala, Uganda])

All adjunct faculty employed in recent years have at least the M.Div. or M.A. degree (Pepperdine University, Abilene Christian University, Yale University, Emory University, Princeton University). Some have earned doctorates (University of Iowa, Harvard University, Louisiana State University, University of Aberdeen, Fuller Theological Seminary). Adjunct faculty with master's degrees are employed exclusively for GE classes. Upper-division and graduate-level courses are taught solely by faculty holding terminal degrees.

Faculty Development and Support

A budget line of \$36,113 was available to the Religion Division for Fiscal Year 2015 for professional travel and research. This is in addition to those faculty who have endowed chairs, professorships, and fellowships that provide funds for travel and research apart from the Religion Division budget (Randall D. Chesnutt, William S. Banowsky Chair in Religion, \$5000; Ronald Cox, Blanche E. Seaver Professor in Religion, \$4000). In addition, several faculty members

received grants from the Seaver Research Council for attendance at international conferences and research in Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America. Drs. Chesnutt and Cox received funding to work with undergraduate students as part of a research project with the Green Scholars Initiative (an international research program) to study an ancient fragment of Romans 4-5. Dr. Cox also received support from the Provost to purchase equipment for advanced photographic imaging, which he has used to develop a new first-year seminar, described above.

Several faculty members received funding from the Summer Undergraduate Research Project and/or the Academic Year Undergraduate Research Initiative for research done jointly with Seaver undergraduates. Dr. Dyron Daughrity has been supported for research and conferences in India, Korea, Africa, and Europe. Dr. Dan Rodriguez received funding from the Templeton Foundation that allowed him to extend his sabbatical to a full year (2012-13); he used the funds to conduct research for a second volume on current developments in primarily Hispanic churches in America. Drs. Daughrity, Cox, and Mathews have received grants from the Glazer Institute to develop courses that highlight Jewish contributions to their communities in different times and places in history. Dr. Chris Doran received support of various types from the Provost to host a conference on the Pepperdine campus to address issues of ecology and environmental sustainability. In short, resources through one channel or another have not been lacking for professional development and research. The CVs of the faculty included on the assessment website bear out the faculty's productivity in terms of publication and other forms of scholarly output.

The retirement of Ms. Sue Ann Meador as Office Manager in 2012 presented an important challenge in the area of staff support for the faculty. We were fortunate that Ms. Tiffany Ferguson, a graduate of the Religion Division, was willing and able to move up from her position as Administrative Assistant to Office Manager, and this allowed for a very smooth transition. The position of Administrative Assistant was filled by Ms. Beverly Cawyer for one year, and since then by Mr. Chris Retts.

Library

Library facilities continue to be adequate for most of our purposes but deficient at times for specialized research by our M.A. thesis students and our faculty. This problem has been mitigated greatly in recent years by a much improved interlibrary loan system and the electronic availability of materials (especially journals) previously inaccessible. One significant innovation has been the designation of a room in Payson Library for Dr. Cox's projects on ancient coins, which he conducts with undergraduate students. (See above under "Responses to 2010")

Physical Space

We have had sufficient office facilities for full-time faculty for the past five years, with an excellent meeting room nearby (Jerene's Room); classrooms are appropriately sized and furnished. Our looming problem involves office space for the future. The only office we have for adjunct faculty is the one now assigned to our full-time visiting faculty member. This means that adjunct faculty must "make do" with the offices of faculty members who are on sabbatical or

assigned to an overseas program. As the Growing Seaver proposal is implemented over the coming years, we will have increasing difficulty supplying adequate office space even for full-time faculty.

Technology

All faculty are equipped with computers, printers, and standard software for pedagogical and professional use. Mr. Chris Low, Technology Liaison for the Religion and Social Science Divisions, is very effective in maintaining all equipment and providing training and/or technical assistance as needed.

Faculty Evaluations

The teacher-course evaluation forms administered near the end of each semester provide our most extensive and immediate student feedback on the quality of our instruction, although they document student perceptions rather than actual learning outcomes. Individual faculty members and the Division chair review the evaluations as well as a summary of the numerical data from each course. The chair provides data to the faculty so that they can determine how their evaluation summaries compare with the averages for courses in each area (REL 101, 102, etc.). The chair tries to meet with every faculty member once every other year (annually with junior faculty) to discuss the evaluations and identify strengths and weaknesses. On the whole this process provides general confirmation that students leave our courses with a favorable impression of their contents, and most have a very favorable impression of the Religion faculty. The evaluation questions are too vague to use them to assess how well the courses meet our Program Learning Outcomes. (For a summary of all course evaluation statistics since Fall 2009, see *Appendix D*)

One area of concern is the overall GPAs for each course. While the grades for REL 101 and 102 tend to range around 3.0 or a little higher, the GPAs for upper division Religion courses typically are 3.3 or higher. This might reflect smaller class sizes and the self-motivations of interested students (in contrast to those in GE courses), but we still need to improve in this area. Also, it would be helpful to compare grades in our upper-division courses with upper-division courses in other degree programs.

The highest averages tend to be in the GSRE 199 sections, but this is primarily attributable to the use of Pepperdine staff for several of these first-year seminars. For example, the following chart from the Fall 2012 semester gives the student evaluations averages and GPAs for three sections taught by tenured faculty and four sections taught by adjuncts.

	Quns 1-7	Quns 8-9	Quns 10-14	GPA
<u>Tenured Faculty</u>				
GSRE 199	4.21	4.33	4.45	2.53
GSRE 199	4.42	4.32	4.59	2.44
GSRE 199	3.52	3.46	3.82	3.47

Adjunct Faculty

GSRE 199	4.55	4.76	4.87	3.76
GSRE 199	4.19	4.73	4.78	3.77
GSRE 199	4.04	4.47	4.58	3.95
GSRE 199	4.63	4.94	4.87	3.80

Program Learning Outcomes

The following paragraphs delineate the Program Learning Outcomes for the undergraduate and graduate degree programs in Religion.

Mission Statement

The Religion Division seeks to guide students toward an integration of rigorous intellectual investigation of religion – especially Christianity – and one’s personal faith.

General Education Learning Outcome

Students will be able to use Christian Scripture and tradition to illuminate and evaluate intelligently the ethical and religious dimensions of contemporary society.

B.A. in Religion – Program Learning Outcomes

Each student earning a B.A. in Religion should be able to:

- interpret biblical texts critically and competently, explaining the meaning of a given text within applicable contexts.
- investigate major and distinctive teachings of the Christian faith, recognizing core beliefs and practices and how these compare with other religions, philosophies, or competing worldviews.
- survey major historical developments in Christianity, especially – but not solely – in the West, discerning internal and external factors that have shaped it in various cultures.
- apply current methods for incorporating the teachings of a faith – especially the Christian faith – into the lives of individuals in a faith community, beginning with oneself.
- communicate coherently in professionally competent written form (following a standard style guide) and in effective oral form on matters of religion, illuminating historical, theological, and pastoral implications for contemporary societies.

Appendix E (“B.A. in Religion: Curriculum Map”) is a matrix that shows the alignment of the curriculum with the learning outcomes listed above for the B.A. program in Religion. Graduate programs are essentially the same, but they omit the GE courses (REL 101, REL 102, REL 301, GSRE 199), and they expect a higher level of understanding on the part of the students.

M.S. in Ministry: Program Learning Outcomes

Each student earning a M.S. in Ministry should be able to:

- interpret biblical texts critically and competently, explaining the meaning of a given text within applicable contexts.
- explore interactions between significant historical developments in Christianity and discussions concerning the major and distinctive teachings of the Christian faith, discerning various factors that have shaped them.
- apply and evaluate current methods for incorporating the teachings of a faith – especially the Christian faith – into the lives of individuals in a faith community, beginning with oneself.
- communicate coherently in professionally competent written form (following a standard style guide) and in effective oral form on matters of religion, illuminating historical, theological, and pastoral implications for contemporary societies.

M.Div.: Program Learning Outcomes

Each student earning a M.Div. should be able to:

- interpret biblical texts critically and competently, explaining the meaning of a given text within applicable contexts and its significance in pertinent streams of current research.
- analyze major and distinctive teachings of the Christian faith, critiquing leading perspectives through the centuries regarding core beliefs and practices and how these compare with other religions, philosophies, or competing worldviews.
- explore major historical developments of Christianity, especially – but not solely – in the West, discerning internal and external factors that have shaped it in various cultures.
- apply and evaluate current methods for incorporating the teachings of a faith – especially the Christian faith – into the lives of individuals in a faith community, beginning with oneself.
- communicate coherently in professionally competent written form (following a standard style guide) and in effective oral form on matters of religion, illuminating historical, theological, and pastoral implications for contemporary societies.

M.A. in Religion: Program Learning Outcomes

Each student earning a M.A. in Religion should be able to:

- evaluate the primary literature, critical methodologies, and secondary literature of a specialized field of religious study.
- utilize a foreign language relevant to one's chosen field of specialization.
- competently illustrate the influence of other areas in the study of religion on one's chosen field of specialization.
- communicate coherently in professionally competent written form (following a standard style guide) and in effective oral form on matters related to one's chosen field of specialization.
- complete and defend a thesis documenting proficiency in all the desired outcomes listed above.

Program Learning Outcomes vis-à-vis Institutional Learning Outcomes

Pepperdine University’s mission statement states: “Pepperdine University is a Christian university committed to the highest standards of academic excellence and Christian values, where students are strengthened for lives of purpose, service, and leadership.” The objectives and learning outcomes of the various degree programs in the Religion Division align perfectly with this larger institutional mission.

The following chart shows how the Program Learning Outcomes of the Religion Division contribute to the Institutional Learning Outcomes of Seaver College more broadly:

Alignment of Religion PLOs with Institutional Learning Outcomes

Institutional Learning Outcomes	PLO #1 interpret Biblical texts	PLO #2 investigate core beliefs	PLO #3 survey historical dev.	PLO #4 apply to faith community	PLO #5 communicate coherently
ILO #1 Demonstrate expertise in an academic or professional discipline, display proficiency in the discipline, and engage in the process of academic discovery.	X	X	X	X	
ILO #2 Appreciate the complex relationship between faith, learning, and practice.	X	X	X	X	
ILO #3 Develop and enact a compelling personal and professional vision that values diversity.	X	X	X	X	
ILO #4 Apply knowledge to real-world challenges.	X	X	X	X	X
ILO #5 Respond to the call to serve others.				X	X
ILO #6 Demonstrate commitment to service and civic engagement.				X	X
ILO #7 Think critically and creatively, communicate clearly, and act with integrity.	X	X	X	X	X
ILO #8 Practice responsible conduct and allow decisions and directions to be informed by a value-centered life.				X	X
ILO #9 Use global and local leadership opportunities in pursuit of justice.				X	X

Assessments of Student Learning

Alumni Survey

The 2010 Report included an Alumni Survey of students that had graduated in the preceding five years. The results of that survey drew from 58 responses out of 92 alumni surveyed. We attempted to repeat this survey – in a slightly updated form – in January 2014. Guidelines prescribed by the Seaver Alumni Office required that the survey be distributed and processed through the Alumni Office. Two appeals to the Religion alumni to complete and return the survey resulted in only 18 responses for more than 100 surveys. It does not seem prudent to distill meaningful conclusions from such a disappointingly low percentage of responses. Still, we have removed the names from the document that delineates the responses, and we provide the raw results in *Appendix F* (“Alumni Survey 2014”).

Longitudinal Study

In the Fall of 2010 we initiated a longitudinal study of the critical thinking skills displayed by Religion students. We decided to follow the progress of the six undergraduates who were enrolled that semester in the REL 302 course, which serves as a “gateway” course to the undergraduate degree programs. A committee of three faculty (Drs. Willis, DeLong, and Doran) was formed to review the written work of the six students over their junior and senior years. The final paper from the REL 302 course served as the first exemplar of the students’ critical thinking skills. The committee evaluated the work according to a slightly revised version of a rubric obtained from Washington State University. Each committee member provided their own assessment of the work, and then the three “scores” were averaged. (See *Appendix G1* – “Longitudinal Study: Evaluations” – and *Appendix G2* – “Guide to Rating...”)

The plan was to have students provide further examples of their work from the following three semesters, with the same committee assessing the work each time. The goal was to determine whether there were any general areas of concern or deficiency at the outset, and if any appreciable improvement was discernible by the end of the students’ two years as Religion majors. Unfortunately, this analysis fell short in two ways. First, despite repeated requests, only three of the six students provided examples of their work after the first semester, and only one did so through their final semester. By the fourth semester, the faculty felt no compulsion to provide evaluations; so, it was felt that there was not enough data available to warrant a meaningful concluding evaluation of the students’ progress. Second, since this was the first time we had attempted such a study, we had not developed a reasonable standard of improvement by which to assess the progress of the students. Rather than giving in to our discouragement, we need to revive this study and make it a regular part of our assessment plan, so that faculty and students alike will come to expect it, and so that we can develop a meaningful standard of evaluation for the years ahead. Also, the introduction of a capstone course should give us “bookend” examples by which we can make clearer comparisons.

Individual Course Assessments

Over the past three years we have conducted basic assessments of nine different courses; in two cases the same course was assessed in two separate years. The faculty in each area of the curriculum (scripture, church history, Christian thought, ministry) developed guidelines and corresponding rubrics for evaluating students' abilities to achieve the Program Learning Outcomes specific to that area; these guidelines and rubrics were developed early in the Fall of 2011. Assessments were conducted by the instructors of the courses during the first two years (2011-2012, 2012-2013), as they applied the rubrics devised by each area to one or two cumulative activities required of students toward the end of the semester. We used a second evaluator from the same instructional area to review the results during the third year (2013-2014). The following list identifies the courses that were assessed; *Appendix H1* ("Assessment Summaries 2012-2014") contains the instructions/questions and written assessments for each course:

- Spring 2012 – REL 505 (Historical Books of the Old Testament), REL 513 (The Synoptic Gospels), and REL 520 (The Christian Faith)
- Fall 2012 – REL 302 (Introduction to Biblical Interpretation) and REL 522 (Systematic Theology II)
- Spring 2013 – REL 330 (History of Christianity)
- Fall 2013 – REL 506 (Prophetic Books of the Old Testament)
- Spring 2014 – REL 330 (History of Christianity), REL 346 (Task of Ministry), and REL 520 (The Christian Faith)

It is much more difficult to capture assessment data specifically for graduate students. The following list identifies five courses that were assessed during the Spring and Fall terms in 2012 from which we were able to disaggregate a few graduate samples. *Appendix H2* ("Assessment Summaries: Graduate 2012") contains the instructions/questions and written assessments for each course, and then some data regarding comprehensive examinations and Master's theses.

- Spring 2012 – REL 505 (Historical Books of the Old Testament), REL 513 (The Synoptic Gospels), and REL 520 (The Christian Faith)
- Fall 2012 – REL 502 (Introduction to Biblical Interpretation) and REL 522 (Systematic Theology II)

Assessment of General Education Courses in Religion

Over the past five years we have conducted two assessments of the Christianity and Culture component of the General Education program, the first in the Spring 2012 term and the second in the Spring 2015 term. This component is met through the three GE Religion courses – REL 101, REL 102, and REL 301. The first review was coordinated by Dr. Chesnutt; those results were passed on to the GE Committee and are presented in *Appendix J1* ("Seaver College GE Assessment: Christianity & Culture"). The second review was conducted by Drs. Mathews and Littlefield and composed by Dr. Littlefield. Their findings and reactions are contained in *Appendix J2* ("Religion Division: GE Writing Assessment Report"). Both studies were

conducted at the request of the General Education Committee and assessed information of greater immediate interest to the GE committee than the Religion Division itself.

External Review

Professor Mark W. Hamilton (Abilene Christian University) visited the Malibu campus January 21-23, 2015. During his visit he met with the entire Religion faculty and staff, and with several undergraduate and graduate students in an effort to assess the vitality of the Religion programs. A copy of his final report is found in *Appendix K*. Prof. Hamilton offered several recommendations in a variety of areas. The Religion faculty have met on two occasions since his visit to review his recommendations and prioritize possible revisions to the program based on those recommendations. While they rejected Prof. Hamilton's suggestion to alter the sequence of GE courses, the faculty have begun in earnest the process of revising the course descriptions for the Religion GE courses, in light of some of his observations. They are investigating the possibility of revising the requirements for the Religion minor and the Vocational Ministry minor, to explore ways to make those programs attractive to a broader number of students. They have also determined to make careful consideration of a re-launch of the off-campus graduate program a priority in the 2015-2016 academic year.