

**Religion Department Assessment Plans
(Working Draft: Submitted 4/5/02)**

Mission Statement

The academic study of religion focuses on the human quest for transformation and meaning, i.e., the search for the most profound (‘ultimate’) meanings and values of human life (good and evil, suffering and redemption, beginnings and endings, personal and collective transformation). It studies the ways humans have raised perennial questions, such as: Who am I? What is of greatest value to us collectively? The exploration of these issues reveals different ways of experiencing the world; diverse religious expressions (mythical, symbolic, ritualistic, ethical) in various geographical, historical, and cultural contexts; transformative effects on the lives of individuals and on the patterns of common life; myriad constructions of elaborate cosmologies and systems of value. Such study helps students acquire the skills needed for fuller reflection and comprehension of the human condition, human nature, history, and the interrelation of religion with social, cultural, and political developments.

Goal Statements

Knowledge (general type of knowledge that religious studies offers to all students (majors, minors, and general students))

- a. Understanding of key approaches (methods, procedures), concepts, and practices in the study of religion
- b. Understanding of the forms in which religion has been described, organized and practiced across cultures and throughout history

Skills (what our students, esp. majors and minors, should be able to do after taking one or more religion courses)

- a. The ability to analyze the interaction of religion with cultural institutions, groups and individuals
- b. The ability to think about religious issues historically and reflectively
- c. The ability to assess religion as an expression of meanings and values in the context of what is perceived as ultimate
- d. The ability to interpret truth claims and to assess ethical norms of particular religions
- e. The ability to write, reason, and speak effectively
- f. The ability to analyze the diverse ways we understand ourselves, our communities, and the universe

Values (the type of valuing or appreciation that religious studies offers to all students)

- a. Appreciation of the variety and diversity in the forms of religious expression among peoples of the world, as found in:
 - i. Religious symbols
 - ii. Religious myths or narratives
 - iii. Creeds or doctrines
 - iv. Rituals or practices
 - v. Ethics or value systems
 - vi. Philosophical concepts
 - vii. Social orderings
- b. Sensitivity to the nuance and subtlety of religious expression and the integrity of
 - i. religious insight
- c. Appreciation of the perspectives of history, psychology, philosophy, sociology, ethics, literature, art, and science
- d. Awareness of the often ambiguous and conflicting manifestations of religious expressions, practices, and institutions in human history and culture

Experience (particular ways of studying and experiencing religious ideas and practices beyond traditional Bucknell classroom settings)

- a. Studying religious systems, expressions, and ideas in study abroad programs
- b. Observing and experiencing forms of religious life in an increasingly diverse world (e.g., field trips, artistic expressions, music, etc.)
- c. Reflecting on the relationship between personal religious commitment and the academic study of religion

Departmental Learning Outcomes and Assessment Techniques

(Desired outcomes and specific techniques used to measure achievement of goals)

Students demonstrate integrative synthesis of knowledge and critical skills found in religion curriculum

Assessment Technique: Dept. will offer new Religion Capstone Courses in 2002-03. These capstone courses will provide diverse topics in and approaches to religious studies. Specific course material and objectives will show the coherency of the religion major. The various assignments (e.g., research papers, essays assignments, exams, oral presentations) will help measure students' understanding of key approaches (methods, procedures), concepts, and practices in the study of religion.

Majors show proficiency in research, writing, and reasoning in religious studies

Assessment Technique: Design and implement a series of Senior Consultations for all majors. During fall semester of senior year, each major will meet and work closely with an individual faculty member to discuss major texts read, to design a set of key questions to be answered, and to identify major concepts and methods pertinent to major's curricular trajectory. The student and faculty member will meet throughout the academic year, and plan a culminating, final "oral" conversation with entire department.

1/4 of all majors will complete religion-related honors thesis

Assessment Technique: Provide explicit faculty support of, and departmental structure for, all honors theses. Every spring semester, the department will host a special meeting for all juniors and discuss the value and import of writing an honors thesis. Eligible and interested students will work closely with a faculty advisor from the inception of the project to its completion. These in-depth projects will show student's proficiency in reading, writing, and reasoning skills. Structure of thesis will follow Honors Council format and will meet its deadlines. Student and advisor will report back to department the outcome of the thesis project.