

Institutional Effectiveness Report

Assessment Summary

Department or Division: Philosophy and Religious Studies

Degree Program: Philosophy and Religious Studies

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Assessment Cycle (academic or calendar year): 2006-2007

Mission (related to VSU mission): The Philosophy and Religious Studies program at Valdosta State University will provide a foundation in the theories, principles, and practices necessary for successful careers and/or future graduate work in Philosophy, Ethics, and Religion.

Assessment History (discuss here how and when the program developed its current assessment program, what it used prior to starting that program to assess its effectiveness, etc.):

The Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies instituted its initial assessment plan in 2002, concurrent with the department Program Review. At that time, the department created student learning outcomes, aligned with its curriculum, and created the senior capstone course in which senior research paper projects would be administered. Research work of senior students in the Capstone would be retained in electronic format, and files of the same individual students' work in lower level classes would be retained in paper format. All together this provided a paper trail of student success showing how the learning outcomes of the major were achieved. In 2003, the department also refined the curriculum of the department, and created dual tracks for our majors (one track emphasizing Philosophy, and another track emphasizing Religious Studies.) Each track required students to take three courses in the other track, and every degree granted from the department is called a degree in Philosophy and Religious Studies. Additionally, in 2006, the department assessment committee re-evaluated the program's student learning outcomes, revised both of the track curriculum descriptions in the Undergraduate Catalog, and added a variety of cross-listed and Religious Studies courses to the curriculum. The revised track curricula were presented to the department and approved unanimously in the Fall of 2006 and went into effect with the 2007 Undergraduate Catalog. The students complete their degree in Philosophy and Religious Studies through a combined Senior Capstone Course (PHIL 4920 Metaphilosophy and REL 4920 Religious Studies Capstone). All results of Capstone courses and majors' work in lower level courses are maintained in the main department office for Philosophy and Religious Studies, and in samples of student work files in the faculty members' offices.

Expected Student Learning Outcomes: There are two sets of learning outcomes for the department, with a set for the Philosophy Track and a set for the Religious Studies Track:

Selected Educational Outcomes (Philosophy Track)

1. To encourage an understanding of central issues, topics and philosophers in the history of philosophy, from the ancient to the modern periods.
2. To develop students' abilities to think, write, and speak critically and logically.
3. To enable students to challenge their own ideas and to develop self-understanding in the context of a diverse range of ideas which inform contemporary controversies and social conflict.
4. To enable students to engage in independent philosophical research, and to be responsible for communicating their understanding of the issues researched and developed, including a working familiarity with current research methods.

Selected Educational Outcomes (Religious Studies Track)

1. To encourage an understanding of the world's religious traditions and their influence on values, norms, and public policies.
2. To develop students' critical and analytical skills and their abilities to articulate clearly an attention to multiple religious perspectives.
3. To enable students to challenge their own ideas and to develop self-understanding in the context of diverse ideas that inform contemporary controversies and social conflict.
4. To enable students to engage in independent research, to increase their sense of problem and to communicate their understanding of the issues researched and developed in the context of current theories and research methods in the discipline.

Assessments (include when and to whom these are administered, and align goals with specific assessments):

- Senior Capstone Portfolio (Conducted in spring of senior year) – Goals 1, 2, 3, & 4 both tracks
- Research Paper Presentation (Conducted in spring of senior year) - Goals 1, 2, 3, & 4 both tracks
- Various written and oral examinations and projects (Conducted each semester) Goals 1, 2, 3, & 4 both Tracks
- External assessments: the National Study of Instructional Costs and Productivity, and the Delaware Study both conducted yearly. These studies the production of student credit hours as well as instructional costs

2005-2006

Assessment Results (submit an electronic file of the data collected):

- **Senior Capstone Student Electronic Portfolios:** More than 80% of the students achieved at the acceptable or better levels for all of the performance criteria. (Goals 1-4 both tracks).

- The Senior Capstone course and other courses in the curricula demonstrated that both Philosophy and Religious Studies students were performing at acceptable levels.

Discussion/Dissemination of Results:

- The Senior Project/Portfolio was evaluated by the faculty member teaching the current Capstone course.
- By 2005, it became clear that the successful enrollment and performance of the dual track program must be represented by a change in the name of the department from “Philosophy” to “Philosophy and Religious Studies.”
- This became a matter of discussion in the departmental assessment committee and in departmental meetings.

Modifications Made:

- In 2006 the department made application for the change in the name of the department and in the summer of 2006 the Board of Regents gave official approval.

2006-2007**Assessment Results:**

- In the Fall of 2006 the department assessment committee re-evaluated the two track curriculum
- The then current curriculum was evaluated in light of the programs in the benchmark institutions for VSU.
- Though the departmental curriculum compared favorably to that of the benchmark institutions some changes were suggested.

Discussion/Dissemination of Results:

- The issue of program revision became a matter for discussion in departmental meetings.
- The department voted to revise both tracks of the program in light of the comparative study with the benchmark institutions, and to add new courses.

Modifications Made:

- Several new courses were drawn up and a new organization of the coursework was added to both tracks.
- The new program was presented to Arts & Sciences during 2006-2007, and approved by Arts & Sciences, and then the Academic Committee.
- The new program was printed in the VSU Catalog in successive years for REL in 2007 & for PHIL in 2008.

2007-2008

Assessment Results

- In 2006 the National Study of Instructional Costs and Productivity indicated that the department had high scores for costs/productivity, and the Delaware Study indicated that the department was scoring at the 75th Percentile for the production of student credit hours.
- Over a four year period the department had improved its productivity by 118% while the College of A & S had grown only 20%.
- Likewise the department had continued to grow in number of majors

Discussion/Dissemination of Results

- Discussion within the departmental assessment committee concluded that the growth of the department also reflected an internal pressure to offer the quantity, quality, and variety of upper level courses to insure student retention and timely graduation of majors.
- Discussion of these issues with the Dean of Arts & Sciences indicated that the data from the National Study of Instructional Costs and Productivity as well as the Delaware Study provided a basis to request an additional faculty member for the department.
- The previous curriculum assessment had indicated a need for innovation in coursework.

Modification

- Based on the strength of the data from the external assessment tools, the department requested an additional faculty member.
- That request was granted despite the budget constraints
- The new faculty hire brought diversity to the department and university, and innovation in coursework.

Dept. Head/ Director

Date

Dean

Date

VPAA

Date

Adapted from: University of Alabama SACS site (<http://sacs.ua.edu/degreeinfo2.cfm?college=2&dept=50>) and

University of Western Kentucky SACS Accreditation Review Process (<http://www.wku.edu/sacs/assessmentmanual.htm>)

Dr. Marila Palmer, LeTourneau University, presentation materials from SACS 2008 Summer Institute