

## Annual Assessment Report

**Department: Religious Studies**  
**Academic Year: 2020-2021**  
**Date of Submission:**  
**Department Chair: Helen Rhee**

### I. Response to the previous year PRC's recommendations

<p><b>Item:</b> Strengthening the language of the Common Context courses regarding reconciliation, race, and diversity</p>	<p><b>Response:</b> The Religious Studies department augmented the language of the Common Context courses regarding reconciliation, race, and diversity in collaboration with the GE Committee as follows (see the highlighted sentence in particular):</p> <p><u>Interpretive Statement</u></p> <p>RS courses will constitute a center for the GE curriculum by establishing a common core of Christian knowledge, addressing the ways the gospel of Christ directs us to live and act, and by providing a foundation for fruitful conversation with and among all the disciplines of the liberal arts and areas of the GE. Our students will recognize that robust Christian faith is not an isolated mental or spiritual compartment, but is shaped by and shapes personal, church, family, academic, and public life. Thus these courses lay a foundation for students to think deeply about worship; the communion of saints; mission; evangelism; the prophetic identity of the Body of Christ as one people birthed from all nations, tribes, peoples, and languages; and our shared work toward justice and reconciliation in a fallen world as they explore other GE and curricular areas.</p>
<p><b>Item:</b> Fortifying the departmental involvement in relevant campus-wide conversations on reconciliation, race, and diversity</p>	<p><b>Response:</b> Members of the Religious Studies department discussed what each member did in the classroom concerning reconciliation, race, and diversity. The department also conducted a survey on race, reconciliation, and diversity in the spring semester of 2021. Please see below in II.A for details of these discussions.</p>
<p><b>Notes:</b></p>	

### II A. Program Learning Outcome (PLO) assessment

*If your department participated in the ILO assessment you may use this section to report on your student learning in relation to the assessed ILO. The assessment data can be requested from the Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness.*

<b>Program Learning Outcome</b>	<b>The Religious Studies program (courses) (positively) challenge and encourage students' faith development</b>
<b>Who is in Charge /Involved?</b>	<p>(1) Every member was involved in discussing this issue at department meetings throughout the fall semester as a concern had been raised by several members regarding RS major students' lack of faith development, particularly their view of Scripture. We collectively developed a survey questionnaire on the correlation between RS courses and students' faith development over their time at Westmont, including student's familiarity with Westmont's doctrine of Scripture and the Statement of Faith as a whole.</p> <p>(2) Telford Work and Sameer Yadav (teaching Doctrines) and Helen Rhee, Charles Farhadian, and Holly Beers (teaching RS upper division courses) were involved in executing the survey in their respective courses.</p>
<b><u>Direct Assessment Methods</u></b>	n/a
<b><u>Indirect Assessment Methods</u></b>	<p>(1) We administered the surveys in Doctrine courses and RS upper division courses to measure students' faith development over time as majors, minors, and also some non-majors.</p> <p>(2) We also conducted several focus group interviews in RS 180 Senior Seminar (Telford Word and Sandra Richter) and RS 110 Jesus and the Gospels (Holly Beers, Helen Rhee, Caryn Reeder, and Telford Work).</p> <p>(3) We also solicited survey responses from recent alums.</p> <p><i>The survey and the spreadsheet result are included in Appendix A and B.</i></p>
<b>Major Findings</b>	<p>The Religious Studies Department used department meetings on January 26, February 9, February 23, and March 9, 2021 to discuss the results of the faith development survey. We found:</p> <p>(1) The overall results show that the students express a good balance of being challenged and experiencing their faith growing in unexpected ways while still being confident in their faith confession. Results of the survey show little signs of danger of students whose faith was disrupted after taking RS courses.</p> <p>(2) None of the students backtracked in their confidence in the GE classes in a negative direction.</p> <p>(3) It would be helpful to give students more assistance/guidance in processing the so-called arguments to maintain their faith.</p>

	<p>(4) There seems to be a challenge for students to read the Bible devotionally and therefore a number of students want to adhere to more devotional readings of Scripture. However, the results do not show if a lack of devotional Bible reading practice is a result of something lacking in the RS classes or something that is lacking in the students' own personal habits.</p> <p>(5) There were some comments requesting more guidance on race issues and more diverse perspectives in the assigned reading, providing them with viewpoints other than a Western perspective.</p> <p>(6) It seems that the students do not resonate widely with Westmont's doctrine of Scripture, particularly inerrancy. They wrestle with reconciling what they are learning about the Bible in their classes and our school's position.</p> <p>(7) It seems that some students do not understand how eternal punishment and justice could come together in light of our Statement of Faith on eschatology (especially judgment).</p>
<p><b>Closing the Loop Activities</b></p>	<p><b>Department-wide discussions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● We have allocated four department meetings to have extensive discussions on the survey result. We resolved to communicate better to the students the relationship of the Westmont Statement of Faith on Scripture and the way that the RS courses use Scripture.</li> </ul> <p><b>Professor-specific developments (Sandra Richter and Holly Beers were in sabbatical in the spring of 2021):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Charlie Farhadian continues to encourage his students to think biblically and theologically about what they do. He will be more overt about what Christian orthodoxy is as a foundation for our lives and what the Bible is.</li> <li>● Telford Work stresses the trustworthiness of the Bible and the ways that is going about teaching it, making a distinction in what the Bible is teaching, and some of the ways it is going about teaching it, especially if those ways are not intuitive in our culture. He will also include the Statement of Faith in his lecture on Trinity.</li> <li>● Helen Rhee introduces students to the interpretations and understandings of early, medieval, and modern Christians on Scripture. She presents her students how their forefathers and foremothers interpreted Scripture showing how they both contextualized Scripture and upheld its timeless trustworthiness. She also lectures on the canonization process and how early Christians understood inspiration.</li> <li>● Bill Nelson in his OT classes affirms the authority of Scripture while discussing text criticism and different perspectives presented in the Old Testament.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sameer Yadav emphasizes that his students think about the Bible as a whole, Old and New Testaments, and how it is God-breathed and without error in all that teaches. He will include the Statement of Faith in his lecture.</li> <li>• Caryn Reeder introduces the process of canonization—how we got the New Testament in the beginning of the classes. She teaches how that process preserves multiple witnesses, interpretations, and different viewpoints in unity. The process shows how the church through time, from the very beginning, was developing a way of preserving diverse perspectives that helps us understand God’s work in the world. She used the Statement of Faith in an assignment to show students how the language for doctrines of faith developed.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Collaboration and Communication</b>  The entire department engaged in significant conversations around these topics throughout the 2020-2021 academic years. See “Who is in Charge/Involved?”.</p>	

<b>Program Learning Outcome</b>	<b>The Religious Studies program (courses) adequately engage students with and equip them on matters of diversity, justice, reconciliation, race, and racism</b>
<b>Who is in Charge /Involved?</b>	<p>(1) Every member who was not on sabbatical was involved in discussing this issue at department meetings in the spring semester as it had been raised by PRC’s recommendation (based on the 2020 senior survey results) and also by some responses to the fall faith development survey. Telford Work, Charlie Farhadian, and Sameer Yadav had a meeting with the ICP Director Blake Thomas to gather his perspective. Then we collectively developed a survey questionnaire on the correlation between the RS courses and students’ engagement with matters of diversity, justice, reconciliation, race, and racism.</p> <p>(2) Telford Work and Sameer Yadav (teaching Doctrines) and Helen Rhee, Charles Farhadian, and Caryn Reeder (teaching RS upper division courses) were involved in executing the survey in their respective courses.</p>
<b><u>Direct Assessment Methods</u></b>	n/a
<b><u>Indirect Assessment Methods</u></b>	<p>(1) We administered the surveys in Doctrine courses and RS upper division courses to measure students’ engagement with the aforementioned topics over time as majors, minors, and also some non-majors. We also solicited the survey responses from recent alumni.</p> <p>(2) Unlike the fall survey, we were pressed with time and were unable to conduct several focus group interviews.</p>

	<i>The survey is included in Appendix C.</i>
<b>Major Findings</b>	<p>(1) There is a noticeably different quality of responses between lower division non-majors (administered in Doctrine) on the one hand, and majors and minors (administered in RS upper division classes) and alumni on the other. The former as whole is very general, short, and vague whereas the latter is more specific, pointed, and helpful.</p> <p>(2) In the former survey result, students were mostly positive in terms of the RS GE courses. A few were pointed in their critiques regarding racial issues in those courses and suggested broader readings, etc., but many more were satisfied with what they experienced. Some students offered opinions on how other religious traditions should be taught in those courses, or perspectives on how other traditions view Christianity, etc. Some students don't seem to understand what the point of those courses is. Several students also commented on how they would like to know more about how the Bible and doctrine has been received in "non-western" traditions and/or global perspectives.</p> <p>(3) In the latter survey result, most want a more explicit focus on race and justice (often broadened to include especially issues of gender and sexuality). Sometimes, however, one student would applaud a course that another student found wanting.</p> <p>(4) Some classes are deemed more naturally relevant and helpful than others; however, some students suggest that these topics should be addressed (more adequately) at the level of the three Common Context courses (OT, NT, and Doctrine).</p> <p>(5) Some students expressed a desire for more class offerings (on these topics), more departmental involvement in wider campus conversations, and more intentional engagement with the intersection of race and faith.</p> <p>(6) Most students report their growth in <i>engaging biblically and theologically</i> on these aspects of ethnicity, race, and cultural competence over their time at Westmont (but not always by taking RS classes).</p> <p>(7) One faculty member said in response to the survey, "Our department conducted this survey in response to some senior voices asking for adequate treatment of these issues. Judging from the surveys and their broad overlap with what faculty have said we offer in our classes, I am satisfied that the GE courses and major are already addressing these topics, not ignoring them, and resources are widely available and even hard to ignore in many classes."</p>
<b>Closing the Loop Activities</b>	<p><b>Professor-specific developments:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Holly Beers tries to address these issues in her Introduction to the New Testament classes by including book selections from scholars of varied races and ethnicities. The classes can explore these works in</li> </ul>

reading assignments. One selection is *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope*. IVP 2020.

- Sandy Richter’s efforts in her Introduction to her Old Testament class includes proposing the question; “What is a biblical response to racism?” Her question to the RS Department: “What is the Religious Studies Department answer to this [question]?”
- Telford Work has his Introduction to Christian Doctrine class read from the Africa Bible Commentary, and the South Asia Bible Commentary. He has also added *The Books of the Negro American Spirituals*. De Capo Press 1989 by James Weldon Johnson and Rosamond J. Johnson. Telford Work desires for students be able to give theological analysis of “How did the Black Church come to exist?”
- Sameer Yadav usually addresses these issues in his Theology and Race course. He hopes that in consideration of these issues will make this class available in the future. He uses the story of redemption in the scriptures as the part of the foundation for his Introduction to Christian Doctrine class. It is important to him for his students to learn how the scriptures relate people to each other. His emphasis in the class is to teach about God’s desire to bring about a mutual belonging to everyone. This opens an avenue for talk about racism in relation to faith. In the class’s study of Christology, the students will explore the different ways Jesus is represented.
- Caryn Reeder’s Greek class has a section to learn about the history of translation. In her Introduction to the New Testament class she has “deliberately chosen “non-white authors.” She also plans to incorporate the art images from Holy Week art from Mafa Christians in North Cameroon (Jesus Mafa). This collection, from the 70’s, the represents a visual perspective of the scriptures according to the Christians of North Cameroon. Caryn wants the students to “see Jesus in other cultural lens” so that students may see that “white Jesus is just one interpretation of Jesus.”
- Caryn Reeder also led a Bible study for five weeks in the spring semester to give major and minor students opportunities to explore and discuss race, racism, anti-racism, and to hear nonwhite perspectives. Five students participated and engaged with the following five interpreters of the given topics: Matthew V. Johnson, John-Howard Wesley, Amos Yong, a bilingual worship service with Pastor Magdalena Garcia, and Austin Channing Brown.
- In Bill Nelson’s Introduction to Old Testament Classes race comes up in various stories. For example in the account of Shem, Ham, and Japheth: presumably all the peoples, tribes, and ethnic groups developed from these three. It is also relevant to the curse on Canaan, Ham’s son (Gen 9:25). Isaac is the child of promise, not Ishmael (Israel vs. foreigners and later Jews vs. Gentiles). The issue is present in the story of Moses: Miriam and Aaron criticize him for marrying a Cushite (African) woman (Num

	<p>12). In the section of the course about the prophets, he emphasizes the importance of seeking justice (Mic 6:8). Amos' text "let justice roll down" (Am 5:24) was a favorite of M. L. King. In the post-exilic period, Ezra and Nehemiah proscribed marriage with foreigners; this leads to a discussion of Paul's teaching that only forbids marrying a non-Christian.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Helen Rhee introduces cultural and regional diversity as part of her History of World Christianity, Early and Medieval Christianity, and Reformation and Modern Christianity classes. Her Church History course explores Christianity beyond the Western Church history. In Early and Medieval Christianity they explore how the Christians, Jews, Greeks, and Romans used race as a category to define themselves: race defined by religious practices, not by biological features or lineage. In Reformation and Modern Christianity course, several class sessions are allotted to the history of African American Christianity, along with African Christianity, Latin American Christianity, Indian and Eastern Asian Christianity, with the readings by the native theologians and historians.</li> <li>▪ Charlie Farhadian explains how missiology is founded in a non-western reality--world religions. His courses explore places of origins of non-western religions. He tries to introduce the students to their "western consciousness--not to show disdain, or feel guilt, but to expand their thoughts through the Gospel." He uses images, but abstains from using many images, because he wants students to "see how diversity is lived, through ethnicity--more than [through] race". He thinks race is not "defined with clarity" in the issues of discussion of racism.</li> </ul>
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**Collaboration and Communication**  
 The entire department was involved in discussing the survey and implementing it.

<b>Program Learning Outcome</b>	<b>Ecclesial Engagement: "participate in Christian life and mission with engaged ecclesial commitment"</b>
<b>Who is in Charge /Involved?</b>	Sandra Richter and Telford Work performed assessment of the 'ecclesial engagement' PLO, since it was the most straightforward outcome given the structure of Senior Seminar's final assignment, since hermeneutical competence had just been assessed the previous year, and because this spring's senior seminar will be an upper-division theology class, making theological judgment the logical assessment topic.
<b><u>Direct Assessment Methods</u></b>	The summative activity of the course, whose topic was Genesis, was a preaching exercise drawing on Genesis and directed toward the hypothetical audience of the student's choice.

<b>Indirect Assessment Methods</b>	n/a
<b>Major Findings</b>	<p>(1) Of six seniors who completed the course, the work of three demonstrated ‘Developed’ (3) ratings and three demonstrated ‘Highly Developed’ (4) ratings, for a mean of 3.5.</p> <p>(2) All six students demonstrated sustained and informed Christian commitment; what separated 3’s from 4’s was more than anything whether it was mature or still maturing, and in one case whether it was adventurously inquisitive rather than complacent. In one case, a ‘3’ rating resulted from a student’s incomplete integration of robust faith and church commitment on the one hand with the major’s coursework and concepts on the other. In another, the student’s confidence in handling and applying the course material needed development, though the student has an impressive intuitive grasp of ministry’s interpersonal dimensions and a firm commitment to Kingdom service. In all cases, the major seems to have helped build a foundation for the greater maturity toward which the department aspires.</p> <p>(3) The ‘4’ scores resulted from demonstrations of consistently superior application of the major’s key concepts and sources to the circumstances of a particular audience. We saw a real synergy of each of these students’ personal passions, church or family heritage, coursework, and callings as these were brought to bear on the challenge of bringing lessons from a passage in Genesis to the chosen audience in ways true to the passage, its broader canonical and theological context, and the audience’s occasion and needs.</p>
<b>Closing the Loop Activities</b>	
<b>Collaboration and Communication</b>	
The entire department was involved in discussing the survey and implementing it.	

or/and

**II B. Key Questions**

<b>Key Question</b>	
<b>Who is in Charge/Involved?</b>	
<b>Direct Assessment Methods</b>	
<b>Indirect Assessment Methods</b>	
<b>Major Findings</b>	



<b>Recommendations</b>	
<b>Collaboration and Communication</b>	

### III. Follow-ups

<b>Program Learning Outcome or Key Question</b>	<p><b>Porter Center Common Room</b></p> <p>A community space for Porter Center has been a long-standing need for all three departments in the building, and it would support a multiplicity of departmental goals. By encouraging faculty/student interactions and allowing for informal RS conversations, faculty will be able to inspire students to further study in RS, address the connection of RS classes with the life of faith, and more. Following the resignation of one department member, an office became available in Porter Center. We plan to turn this office into a common room.</p>
<b>Who was involved in implementation?</b>	<p>Caryn Reeder and Helen Rhee worked together with Jim Taylor on a request for funding for the common room (though the disruptions of the pandemic have delayed the process). Roz Smith, the RS/Philosophy department assistant, took responsibility for organizing the clearing out of the old furniture from the office. Michelle Hughes from Education also joined our conversation with Randy Jones in designing the office.</p>
<b>What was decided or addressed?</b>	<p>Our plan is to furnish the office with armchairs and tables in a flexible arrangement. The office will be used as a student lounge and study space, room for conferences or meetings, and as a space for adjuncts as needed. The funding was approved by Patti Hunter. After the old furniture was cleared out from the office, the office was newly painted. New furniture was just installed in the first week of the new school year.</p>
<b>How were the recommendations implemented?</b>	<p>We will continue to work with the Philosophy and Education Department to furnish the spare office. We would also like to continue to explore the option of outdoor seating near the main entrance to the building.</p>
<p><b>Collaboration and Communication</b></p> <p>The department was involved in discussions concerning the spare office. Caryn Reeder, Helen Rhee, Roz Smith, and Jim Taylor worked particularly closely on developing the funding request and beginning the process of clearing out the spare office.</p>	

**IV. Other assessment or Key Questions related projects**

<b>Project</b>	
<b>Who is in Charge /Involved?</b>	
<b>Major Findings</b>	
<b>Action</b>	
<b>Collaboration and Communication</b>	

**V. Adjustments to the Multi-year Assessment Plan (optional)**

<b>Proposed adjustment</b>	<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Timing</b>

**VI. Appendices**

- Appendix A: RS Faith Development Survey
- Appendix B: RS Faith Development Survey Spreadsheet
- Appendix C: RS Faith Development Survey Focus Group Notes
- Appendix D: RS Race Survey
- Appendix E: RS PLO Rubric

*A draft of this annual report was prepared by Helen Rhee. The draft was circulated to the entire department, which were discussed and commented on it in a department meeting in September 2021. Department members' comments and suggestions were incorporated into the final version.*