

Self-Study
Department of Humanities and Religious Studies
2007-2008

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Introduction

The Department of Humanities and Religious Studies chose Option C: Focused Inquiry, as described on pp. 8-9 of the "Program Review Process Experiment" document as the model for its self-study.

Following the Option C format, our Self-Study Report includes three main sections:

Section I focuses on information provided by the Office of Institutional Research as part of the Department's 2007 *Fact Book*, alumni survey and other data requested by the department;

Section II delineates the Department's teaching and learning goals, presents our most current assessment, offers plans for both near- and long-term assessments and discusses our assessment findings and goals.

Section III places our department in a larger state, national and disciplinary context. We intend this section to provide us with an opportunity to compare ourselves to other programs and to explore the alignment of our curriculum with both our departmental goals and the most important elements of theory, method and good practice in our field. As part of this section, the Department will address recommendations arising from our previous program review. The pilot project allows programs to undertake "focused" inquiry as an element of self-study and the HRS Department used this opportunity to explore its relationship to General Education and the alignment of the Department mission with the University's Baccalaureate Learning Goals.

This section also includes a discussion of the Liberal Arts Master's Program and our nascent plans to reorganize the LIBA program into a Humanities Master's program.

Section I/Data

General information about the program, e.g., data on students, faculty, staff, facilities, etc. (most of which is supplied by Office of Institutional Research)

The Office of Institutional Research has provided the Department with hardcopies of the *Factbooks* for 2007 and 2008 (also available electronically at the OIR website--- www.oir.csus.edu).

While much of the information generated by the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) for program fact books is interesting and provides an overview of the relationships among departments, colleges and the University, for a program the size of Humanities and Religious Studies, much of the data is of limited usefulness or meaningfulness. For example, as the "Input: Students" section of the Fact Book reveals in Table 1, the departmental headcounts for new students and transfers are quite small when placed in the context of the College and University population, ranging from 3 first-time freshmen to 20 new transfers. Similarly, OIR has identified graduate student enrollments ranging from 36 to 48 students from 2002-2006, and this number does not include students in the HIST/Humanities Master's program. The number of graduate students in the LIBA program represents less than 8.5% of the graduate students in the College of Arts and Letters.

A disturbing trend revealed in the OIR data is evidence of a steady decline in majors over the past five years---from a high of 104 majors in fall 2003 to 73 majors in fall 2007 (Table 2 in both the 2007 and 2008 *Factbooks*). While the department has maintained generally full classes, that is in large measure due to our commitment to the General Education curriculum.

Information found in the "Process: Curriculum and Instruction" section may be worth exploring in greater depth. For example, generally students in the HRS Department consistently enroll in slightly fewer units than the College or University mean even though over the ten-year period surveyed about 2/3 of HRS majors are identified as full-time. Why that might be important and what this differential means in terms of course planning, scheduling or time to degree is an issue the Department may want to explore in the future if the implications of this figure are that students encounter structural impediments to full enrollment. At the moment, the figure provided by OIR is not of particular concern to the Department.

The tables in the "Process: Curriculum and Instruction" section of the Fact Books provide both 5-year (2002-2006 and 2003-2007) and 10-year data about class size, course enrollments, FTEs, Student/Faculty Ratio and faculty workload and demographics.

Table 6: The classes offered by HRS are consistently larger than the College or University average. The Department continues to discuss which of our courses are adaptable to large lecture settings or technology-enhanced formats. In general, such decisions have been primarily driven by instructor interest. Full-time faculty members teaching mega sections receive "excess enrollment" assigned time which reduces the number of separate sections they must teach during the semester. When temporary faculty members are assigned to mega sections, they are compensated for two sections of the class, if enrollments reach 80-100 students.

Table 7: Course enrollments during the past five years and over the ten-year cycle have been tracked by OIR. Not surprisingly, courses like HRS 161: Multicultural America and HRS 140: Exploring World Religions which fulfill "supervenient" graduation requirements have been the most heavily enrolled classes in the HRS curriculum.¹ The next two largest course enrollments are in our mythology classes---HRS 119: Classical Mythology and HRS 151: World Mythologies---which have been revised and offered in mega sections at least once each year since Fall 2005. HRS 180: The Film also has had significant enrollment over the past five years, in part because it is consistently offered in a SACCT-supported mega-section format. In the Fall of 2008, a departmental faculty member offered the first section of a hybrid HRS class (TV/classroom), HRS 142: The History of Christianity which enrolled 140 students.

The enrollment data provided by OIR demonstrates that faculty members have made some strategic decisions about what courses can be offered in larger sections and non-traditional formats in order to meet the Department's FTEs targets while still providing discussion and writing-centered experiences for students in many classes. Despite these efforts to maximize enrollments and resources while continuing

¹ HRS 161 is a General Education course and fulfills the Race and Ethnicity graduation requirement. HRS 140 meets both General Education and Writing Intensive requirements.

to offer high quality instruction and challenging educational experiences, the Department has seen some reductions in some course enrollments.

A significant decline has taken place in enrollments in some of the Department's lower-division offerings, which (with the exception of HRS 21) are courses which meet both major and General Education requirements. Enrollments in HRS 10: Arts and Ideas of the West: Ancient to Medieval, have dipped dramatically, from a high of 193 students in fall 2002 to a low of 70 students in fall 2007. Enrollment in HRS 11: Arts and Ideas of the West: Renaissance to Modern has increased over the same period, from a low of 68 students in the 2002-2003 academic year to a high of 143 in 2007-2008. The Arts and Ideas of Asia series, HRS 70 and HRS 71 has remained relatively stable---perhaps because, most often, only single sections of these classes are offered in alternate semesters.

Table 8: HRS faculty members consistently teach more students in their classes than their colleagues in the College of Arts and Letters and in the University at-large. The HRS department SFR has ranged from 24.2 to 30.4 in the last five years, and the 10-year mean of HRS department (including the 2007-2008 academic year) was 27.8 compared to the College 10-year mean of 21.7 and the University 10-year mean of 21.6. While the department's FTEF and FTEs figures make up small percentages of the College total (between 4.6-5.3% of the College's FTEs and between 3.4 and 4.1% of the College's FTEF) over the past five to ten years, the SFR suggest that the HRS Department faculty is contributing to the College's enrollment in meaningful ways.

Table 9: The HRS faculty is overwhelmingly Caucasian, although gender parity has been reached. As of Fall 2008, with the resignation of one of our tenure-track colleagues, all full-time faculty members in HRS are tenured at the associate or full professor level. The HRS Department faculty is divided almost evenly among tenured and non-tenure track faculty, so as the budget improves, the Department will continue to work toward the 75/25 mix of tenure track/non-tenure track faculty which the CSU system has declared to be the optimum ratio.

The "Outcomes: Student Academic Performance" section of the department fact book provides data on grade distributions, g.p.a., retention and graduation over the past five-year period. Candidly, the scale of the HRS major makes it difficult to determine what information in this section is worth more focused attention. For example, Table 15 in the 2007-2008 *Factbook* shows no first-time freshmen graduating within 6 years. However, the graphs for that table show a steadily increasing graduation rate among transfer HRS majors which generally matches or slightly exceeds the College and University rate.² A review of the rosters of the department's capstone class, HRS 190, from spring 2003 to spring 2007, reveals enrollments between 18 and 26 students, suggesting that the HRS majors are graduating at a steady rate.

Section II/Assessment

"A statement of intended student learning outcomes at the program level; methods for assessing them, including the use of direct measures; assessment results to date; and documentation of the use of

² *Fact Book*, Fall 2008, 20.

assessment results in efforts to achieve program improvement (assistance with the preparation of which is available from the University Assessment Coordinator)."

Our department adopted its current Assessment Plan in May 2004.³ Since that time, while some of the plan's directives have been implemented, a number have not. Since 2004, the terrain of assessment at the University has shifted in both scale and importance. Our recent efforts to prepare assessment plans for GE Area C review revealed the scope of the task before us and the need to develop a more manageable and meaningful system for evaluating our programs' educational effectiveness.

In 2006-2007, the faculty teaching HRS 140: Exploring World Religions, which meets the General Education requirement for an Writing Intensive course, assessed the department learning goals for analytical reading and expository writing skills.⁴ The participating faculty members agreed to a common essay prompt which they administered as either a short paper assignment or as an essay question on a take-home examination. 70% of students scored at the "C" level or better.

At the direction of the University General Education Policy/Graduation Requirements Committee, the department prepared assessment reports for all GE Area C1 and GE Area C4 classes taught in the spring of 2008. Those section-based reports were provided to the Committee in June of 2008. That material was included in the GE Assessment Report prepared by the Committee's Assessment Consultant, Beth Strasser, in the summer of 2008.

The Department used this opportunity to meet the dual goals of GE Area C assessment reporting and the Department's desire to investigate the alignment of its departmental goals with General Education Area C and the University Baccalaureate Learning Goals. As a part of the process, and to meet the Self-study mandate that assessment be included in the report, a departmental reporting template which identified the GE Area C learning goals that aligned with the University Baccalaureate Learning Goal for Cultural Literacy was developed in consultation with the Faculty Assessment Coordinator, Terry Underwood and the HRS Program Review Team Chair, Amy Liu.⁵

The HRS faculty effectively demonstrated the alignment of their courses (and by implication, the program) with the student learning outcomes developed for both General Education Area C and the Baccalaureate Learning Goals. Without exception, HRS faculty were able to offer specific examples of assignments and activities linked to the Department's goal of cultural literacy, GE Area C (Arts and Humanities) learning goals and the Baccalaureate Learning Goals for "Cultural Legacy." This information confirmed the Department's sense that the emphasis on cultural literacies which is present in the Department's course matrix is actually reflected in the department curriculum. Additionally, this assessment reflected the Department's belief that its curriculum provides a strong foundation for this University-level educational goal.

³ Appendix 1: Department of Humanities and Religious Studies Assessment Plan, 2004

⁴ Appendix 1: section IIA

⁵ Appendix 3

In assessing their students' learning, many faculty members identified students' lack of preparation and commitment to the General Education portion of their degree plans as central elements in their success in meeting the learning goals HRS has identified as central to its mission. Course-based assessments indicate that many members of the HRS faculty will emphasize more tightly organized in-class assignments to prod their students' learning. However, the Department hopes that the Program Review Team and external consultant can help the Department determine how these activities might "play out" on a programmatic level.

Specifically, the departmental faculty realizes that to effect program-level improvements, both the faculty, as individuals, and the Department as a whole, needs to reform its program assessment activities to shift its focus from its goals for its teaching efforts to strategies that would strengthen student learning in the program. In particular, HRS faculty members have identified a significant flaw in the dualistic categories of major/GE student which has pervaded previous discussions of our program. HRS classrooms are complex learning environments, with students who fall along a spectrum of competence as well as a spectrum of commitment to learning and interest in the subjects being taught that is independent of the students' major. The Department hopes to gain from the insights of the program review team and external consultant in order to more precisely analyze the effects and needs of the dynamic mix of students in HRS courses.

The assessment reports reveal a faculty overwhelmingly committed to effective teaching. Every faculty member's report revealed a considerable level of effort devoted to developing, revising and improving the materials and content of their courses, with the intention of providing their students with exposure to "human accomplishments in the creative and performing arts and achievements of human thought."⁶ As a matter of fact, preparing for this report led the Department to update and refine its overarching framework of teaching and learning goals.⁷

In doing so, the Department intended to continue to devote significant energy and resources to our support of the University's curriculum while also acknowledging the importance of the components of the program which are not attached to General Education---there are three courses in our undergraduate program which are only open to majors, HRS 105: Approaches to the Humanities, HRS 108: Approaches to Religious Studies and HRS 190: Topics in Humanities and Religious Studies. In the 2008-2009 academic year the Department will focus its attention on HRS 190: Topics in Humanities and Religious Studies, and we plan to assess the written communication skills of our majors. A committee of three faculty members will read a random sample of anonymous HRS 190 papers using a rubric adopted by the Department for evaluating writing.⁸ While that process and reflection on the findings has not been completed, there have been several informal conversations among the committee members and instructors that suggest the need to clarify and refine the final assignments in HRS 190 to more clearly reflect the skills we expect students to have developed in their earlier core classes.

⁶ Baccalaureate Learning Goals/www.

⁷ Appendix 2: Revised Teaching and Learning Goals (October 2007)

⁸ Appendix 4: HRS 190 Department Assessment Rubric

Assessment in the Department seems to flow in two parallel streams, which has complicated our efforts at student learning assessment at the program level. While faculty clearly assess student learning on a course-basis, and the Department has made some strides in the adoption of a rubric for evaluating student writing for both majors and General Education courses, there has not been much program-level assessment of students' acquisition of what the Department described in 2001 as "disciplinary competencies:"

- Make meaningful comparisons among cognate forms and ideas in diverse societies;
- Develop sophisticated understandings of historical epochs and contextualize the major expressive works and ideas of those epochs;
- Engage in critical analysis of texts and identify central themes and concepts;
- Display critical reasoning skills;
- Awareness of theories of art;
- Awareness of theories of religious experience;
- Ability to write expository/analytical papers;
- Command of standard English;
- Demonstrate superior ability to articulate logically structured thesis;
- Demonstrated superior reading skills---evidenced by retention of salient facts and key ideas;
- Information literacy/computer skills

In some ways, the Department's expectation seems to be that a successful student will develop and demonstrate these skills in a rather random way, by passing through a variety of the program's courses. This impression is reinforced by the course matrix that was developed in 2001. Required as part of the Self-study, that matrix mapped the preferred competencies across the HRS curriculum, but the Department needs to review the matrix as part of a discussion of when, how, or in what courses one should be called on to demonstrate acquisition of these skills and qualities in the context of the program's goals, rather than simply as course-based tasks.

In addition to these competencies, the Department's interest in learning goals that are broader and more about attitude development and life-long learning provides a second, overlapping set of goals which seem to speak to broader program-centered concerns. Those teaching and learning goals, which were reframed in October 2007, led the Department to its review of cultural literacy in the spring of 2008:

- Development of cultural literacy within a global context;
- Development of an empathetic understanding of human diversity within historical and cross-cultural contexts;
- Understanding of the arts and expressions of social/philosophical values;
- Understanding of the academic study of religion and knowledge of the world's religious traditions.

A layer of complication is added to program-level assessment as a result of the Department's commitment to General Education and the current emphasis, in that program, on Area assessment and course syllabus compliance rather than on a more comprehensive set of student learning goals, such as the Baccalaureate Learning Goals. The Department undertook a somewhat successful effort to contextualize its teaching and learning goals, General Education Area C learning goals and the

Baccalaureate Learning Goal which seemed most clearly aligned with the Department's curriculum and faculty interests---Cultural Legacy. One problem with this approach is the sheer scale of the effort required (since the HRS curriculum is more than 98% General Education courses) from faculty in terms of developing and implementing a useful assessment. Figuring out how to organize a sustainable and meaningful assessment plan, with a mechanism for evidence-driven decisions about the curriculum, has continued to stymie the Department.

The 2000/2001 General Education Self Study identified the Department of Humanities and Religious Studies curriculum as 98.3% general education courses. The HRS faculty effectively demonstrated the alignment of their courses (and by implication, the program) with the student learning outcomes developed for both General Education Area C and the Baccalaureate Learning Goals. Without exception, HRS faculty were able to offer specific examples of assignments and activities linked to the Department's goal of cultural literacy, GE Area C (Arts and Humanities) learning goals and the Baccalaureate Learning Goals for "Cultural Legacy." This information confirmed the Department's sense that the emphasis on cultural literacies which is present in the Department's course matrix is actually reflected in the department curriculum. Additionally, this assessment reflected the Department's belief that its curriculum provides a strong foundation for this University-level educational goal.

While some progress has been made (as evidenced by the difference between the 2006-2007 annual assessment report and the 2007-2008 annual report), the Department will need the services of the Faculty Coordinator for Assessment again in the near future in order to develop a systematic, detailed and sustainable assessment plan.

The HRS Department also supports graduate education in the form of our administration of the Liberal Arts Master's Program and our collaboration with the Department of History on the History M.A. with a concentration in Humanities. The HRS Department's contribution to the HIST/Humanities Master's program is not particularly significant in terms of departmental resources---few students choose that track in the HIST department---HRS and LIBA courses numbered above 200 are open to HIST/HRS students.

The Liberal Arts Master's Program has been administered by the department since 1994. Section III of this report includes a section on that program, in order to receive feedback from the program review team and external consultant about a preliminary proposal to change LIBA to an HRS Master's program. In addition to a lack of any institutionally-agreed upon learning goals for graduate education, the Department must acknowledge that it has paid little attention to assessment of learning in the master's program, at either a micro- or macro-level.

Section III/Focused Inquiry

"...the results of a *focused* inquiry addressing issues of particular interest/concern to the program itself, in the context of what is currently important to the college and university."

The Undergraduate Program

As part of this Program Review cycle, the Department examined a broad array of undergraduate humanities and/or religious studies programs across North America (the actual combining of both fields, as in our situation, is quite rare). In this regard, we are guided by paragraph C. of section I (“Program Introduction/History”) of Option A:

What major state and national trends (new developments in theory, research, and pedagogy) are occurring in your discipline? How does your curriculum structure and course offerings compare to those of similar programs in your discipline? What responses to changes in the discipline is your department planning and/or implementing?

The Department’s mission statement provided the basis for our focused inquiry:

The Department of Humanities and Religious Studies has a vital two-fold mission within the University Community. First and foremost, through general education courses the Department provides the foundation for undergraduate students’ historical and contemporary interdisciplinary understanding, appreciation of the arts, and development of tolerance and respect for diverse cultures and religious cultural systems. Second, within its undergraduate major, the Department strives to facilitate students’ achievement of an historical and contextual understanding of changing perspectives on aesthetic and spiritual values, an historical, contextual and interdisciplinary understanding of diverse cultures and global religious systems.

The Sacramento State Department of Humanities and Religious Studies is unique in the CSU system, where there are eight departments of humanities and eight departments of religious studies.

Although some campuses connect humanities and religious studies for administrative purposes, our program is the only one whose curriculum makes intentional connections between the study of expressive and religious cultures in both historical and contemporary contexts.

A 2008 review of departments of Humanities and Religious Studies revealed five other programs in the United States:

Humanities, Arts & Religion at Northern Arizona University
<http://www.cal.nau.edu/him/>

Philosophy, Religion and Humanities at Austin (TX) Community College
<http://www.austincc.edu/philosophy/>

Humanities, Philosophy and Religious Studies at Chattanooga State University
<http://www.chattanoogastate.edu/humanities/hupilrs.asp>

Religion and Humanities at Roberts Wesleyan College (Rochester, NY)
<http://www.roberts.edu/Academics/AcademicDivisions/ReligionHumanities>

Philosophy, Humanities and Religious Studies at Grossmont College (El Cajon, CA)
<http://www.grossmont.edu/philhumrel/>