**2018-2019 Annual Program Assessment Report**

Please submit report to your department chair or program coordinator, the Associate Dean of your College, and to [james.solomon@csun.edu](mailto:james.solomon@csun.edu), Director of the Office of Academic Assessment and Program Review, by September 30, 2019. You may, but are not required to, submit a separate report for each program, including graduate degree programs, which conducted assessment activities, or you may combine programs in a single report. **Please identify your department/program in the file name for your report.**

**College: Humanities**

**Department: Religious Studies**

**Program:**

**Assessment liaison:**

1. **Please check off whichever is applicable:**

**A. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Measured student work within program major/options.**

**B. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Analyzed results of measurement within program major/options.**

**C. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Applied results of analysis to program review/curriculum/review/revision major/options.**

**D. \_\_\_\_\_X\_\_\_ Focused exclusively on the direct assessment measurement of General Education Social Sciences learning outcomes**

1. **Overview of Annual Assessment Project(s).** On a separate sheet,provide a brief overview of this year’s assessment activities, including:

* an explanation for why your department chose the assessment activities (measurement, analysis, application, or GE assessment) that it enacted
* if your department implemented assessment **option A**, identify which program SLOs were assessed (please identify the SLOs in full), in which classes and/or contexts, what assessment instruments were used and the methodology employed, the resulting scores, and the relation between this year’s measure of student work and that of past years: (include as an appendix any and all relevant materials that you wish to include)
* if your department implemented assessment **option B**, identify what conclusions were drawn from the analysis of measured results, what changes to the program were planned in response, and the relation between this year’s analyses and past and future assessment activities
* if your department implemented **option C**, identify the program modifications that were adopted, and the relation between program modifications and past and future assessment activities
* if your program implemented **option D**, exclusively or simultaneously with **options** **A, B, and/or C**, identify the basic skill(s) assessed and the precise learning outcomes assessed, the assessment instruments and methodology employed, and the resulting scores
* in what way(s) your assessment activities may reflect the university’s commitment to diversity in all its dimensions but especially with respect to underrepresented groups
* any other assessment-related information you wish to include, including SLO revision (especially to ensure continuing alignment between program course offerings and both program and university student learning outcomes), and/or the creation and modification of new assessment instruments

**3. Preview of planned assessment activities for 2019-20.** Include a brief description as reflective of a continuous program of ongoing assessment.

**2. Overview of Annual Assessment project**

In 2018-2019, in compliance with CSUN’s direct measurement of General Education assessment in the category of Arts and Humanities, the Religious Studies Department assessed Arts and Humanities SLOs in RS 100: Introduction to Religious Studies. We chose RS 100 as we were advised to pick the course with highest DFU by the Director of Academic Assessment and Program Review. The two Arts and Humanities SLOs selected for assessment were:

1. Explain and reflect critically upon the human search for meaning, values, discourse,

and expression in one or more eras/stylistic periods or cultures

5. Use appropriate critical vocabulary to describe and analyze works of artistic

expression, literature, philosophy or religion and a comprehension of the historical

context within which a body of work as created or a tradition emerged.

The assessment was done in the Spring semester in four sections of RS 100. It was completed by 96 students in the final three weeks of the semester. Students were given time during class to complete the multiple-choice test designed to assess their ability to reflect critically upon human search for meaning and to identify critical vocabulary to analyze religious works and expressions. In this assignment, students were instructed to read excerpts from two different sacred texts (Agganna Sutta/*Dīgha Nikāya* and The Book of Genesis) and then answer a series of 6 multiple-choice questions designed to test their competence in accordance with the two SLOs (See Appendix A for the assessment tool). The questions were created with the contributions of the assessment liaison, curriculum committee members, RS 100 Instructors, and the Chair.

**Summary of Results**

The average overall score was **3.7**/6 = **62.25**%

The average overall score with outlier removed: **70.8**%

Average score based on SLOs

Questions #1, #4 (SLO 1): **68%**

Questions #2, #3, #5, #6 (SLO 5): **57**% (**71%** without the outliner)

Of the 6 total questions, 4 of them show a correct response rate above 70%. Question #6 was an outliner with the correct response rate falling below 20%. The question asked students to identify the right theistic model for the Buddhist text (*Dīgha Nikāya*) in which only about 16.6% were able to correctly identify as non-theistic.”

Question #1 also showed slightly lower correct response rate compared to other questions. It was asking students to associate the two texts with the right component of religion. 61% of students correctly identified it as “myth” while many others picked “ritual” and   
“the problem of evil and suffering.”

**Analysis of Results**

Based on these results, we can conclude that students in RS 100 were short of the benchmark expectations of 70% correct. However, when we remove the outlier (question #6), the rate goes up to 71%, meeting the benchmark expectations. Likewise, SLO 1 falls a bit short of the benchmark with 68% of correct answer rate while SLO 5 falls short significantly--albeit exceeding it when we remove the outlier. Analysis of responses to individual questions provides further insight into areas of strength and areas for improvement.

The reason most students struggled with question # 6 might be attributed partly to their lack of familiarity with the text. It is not explicit whether the text is Buddhist or Hindu. The fact that many students chose “dualism” as an answer might also indicate their lack of familiarity with the term. In any case, that only 16% of students picked non-theism as an answer when Buddhism was one of the possible traditions from which the text originated, might indicate that some of the key vocabularies and terms in the study of religion are not being successfully imparted in RS 100 classes.

Question #1 also showed a relatively lower correct response rate (61%). The question asked students to identify the correct genre of the texts by associating them with the right component of religion. One reason for this could be the obscure nature of the first text used for the Assessment activity. The text does have any clear sign indicating which religious tradition it belongs to. Another possible interpretation is that many students were hesitant about associating the well-known Jewish/Christian creation story of Genesis 1 with the term myth, a common problem many instructors of Introductory classes in Religious Studies face as students learn how to differentiate scholarly approach to religion from faith-based approach. This problem was also pointed out in last year’s assessment as well. Yet another possibility is that students don’t have a clear understanding of the term myth. This year’s result, along with last year’s, keeps indicating that this is an area that needs to be better emphasized in our introductory courses.

The results will be shared with the faculty and discussed at the faculty meeting in Fall 2019. The department will discuss ways in which we can implement plans to improve student learning in areas that showed weakness.

Our department’s assessment activities reflect the university’s commitment to diversity because diversity is built into the very core of our courses including RS 100. In RS 100 classes, students gain knowledge and appreciation of diverse cultures by learning about them in different historical contexts. This year’s assessment questions included a Sacred Text from a non-Western/Christian tradition.

**3. Preview of Planned Assessment Activities for 2019-2020**

In compliance with the University’s plan to assess Section D (Social Sciences and U.S. History and Government) of the General Education program, next year we will assess RS 255: American Religious History and Ideals. Assessment will proceed according to the requirements of the University’s GE Assessment plan.

**APPENDIX A: ASSESSMENT TOOL**

**INSTRUCTIONS:** The goal of this assignment is to assess student learning in Religious Studies course. First, please read the following two excerpts from religious texts. After reading the excerpts, answer the 6 multiple-choice questions by circling the correct answer

You are welcome to write on this paper as needed. Please do not write your name.

**Agganna Sutta (Dīgha Nikāya)**

**Excerpts from DN 27.**

9. ‘Vasettha, all of you, though of different birth, name, clan and family, who have gone forth from the household life into homelessness, if you are asked who you are, should reply: “We are ascetics, followers of the Sakyan.”[**821**](http://www.palicanon.org/en/sutta-pitaka/transcribed-suttas/majjhima-nikaya/142-mn-88-bhitika-sutta-the-cloak.html#calibre_link-892) He whose faith in the Tathagata is settled, rooted, established, solid, unshakeable by any ascetic or Brahmin, any deva or mara or Brahma or anyone in the world, can truly say: “I am a true son of Blessed Lord, born of his mouth, born of Dhamma, created by Dhamma, an heir of Dhamma.” Why is that? Because, Vasettha, this designates the Tathagata: “The Body of Dhamma”,[**822**](http://www.palicanon.org/en/sutta-pitaka/transcribed-suttas/majjhima-nikaya/142-mn-88-bhitika-sutta-the-cloak.html#calibre_link-893) that is, “The Body of Brahma”,[**823**](http://www.palicanon.org/en/sutta-pitaka/transcribed-suttas/majjhima-nikaya/142-mn-88-bhitika-sutta-the-cloak.html#calibre_link-894) or “Become Dhamma”, that is, “Become Brahma”.[**824**](http://www.palicanon.org/en/sutta-pitaka/transcribed-suttas/majjhima-nikaya/142-mn-88-bhitika-sutta-the-cloak.html#calibre_link-895)

10. ‘There comes a time, Vasettha, when, sooner or later after a long period, this world contracts.[**825**](http://www.palicanon.org/en/sutta-pitaka/transcribed-suttas/majjhima-nikaya/142-mn-88-bhitika-sutta-the-cloak.html#calibre_link-896) At a time of contraction, beings are mostly born in the Abhassara Brahma world. And there they dwell, mind-made, feeding on delight, self-luminous, moving through the air, glorious — and they stay like that for a very long time. But sooner or later, after a very long period, this world begins to expand again. At a time of expansion, the beings from the Abhassara Brahma world, [85] having passed away from there, are mostly reborn in this world. Here they dwell, mind-made, feeding on delight, self-luminous, moving through the air, glorious[**826**](http://www.palicanon.org/en/sutta-pitaka/transcribed-suttas/majjhima-nikaya/142-mn-88-bhitika-sutta-the-cloak.html#calibre_link-897) — and they stay like that for a very long time.

11. ‘At that period, Vāseṭṭha, there was just one mass of water, and all was darkness, blinding darkness. Neither moon nor sun appeared, no constellations or stars appeared, night and day were not distinguished, nor months and fortnights, no years or seasons, and no male and female, beings being reckoned just as beings.[**827**](http://www.palicanon.org/en/sutta-pitaka/transcribed-suttas/majjhima-nikaya/142-mn-88-bhitika-sutta-the-cloak.html#calibre_link-898) And sooner or later, after a very long period of time, savoury earth[**828**](http://www.palicanon.org/en/sutta-pitaka/transcribed-suttas/majjhima-nikaya/142-mn-88-bhitika-sutta-the-cloak.html#calibre_link-899) spread itself over the waters where those beings were. It looked just like the skin that forms itself over hot milk as it cools. It was endowed with colour, smell and taste. It was the colour of fine ghee or butter, and it was very sweet, like pure wild honey.

12. ‘Then some being of a greedy nature said: “I say, what can this be?” and tasted the savoury earth on its finger. In so doing, it became taken with the flavour, and craving arose in it.[**829**](http://www.palicanon.org/en/sutta-pitaka/transcribed-suttas/majjhima-nikaya/142-mn-88-bhitika-sutta-the-cloak.html#calibre_link-900) Then other beings, taking their cue from that one, also tasted the stuff with their fingers. They too were taken with the flavour, and craving arose in them. So they set to with their hands, breaking off pieces of the stuff in order to eat it. And [86] the result of this was that their self-luminance disappeared. And as a result of the disappearance of their self-luminance, the moon and the sun appeared, night and day were distinguished, months and fortnights appeared, and the year and its seasons. To that extent the world re-evolved.

13. ‘And those beings continued for a very long time feasting on this savoury earth, feeding on it and being nourished by it. And as they did so, their bodies became coarser,[**830**](http://www.palicanon.org/en/sutta-pitaka/transcribed-suttas/majjhima-nikaya/142-mn-88-bhitika-sutta-the-cloak.html#calibre_link-901) and a difference in looks developed among them. Some beings became good-looking, others ugly. And the good-looking ones despised the others, saying: “We are better-looking than they are.” And because they became arrogant and conceited about their looks, the savoury earth disappeared. At this they came together and lamented, crying: “Oh that flavour! Oh that flavour!” And so nowadays when people say: “Oh that flavour!” when they get something nice, they are repeating an ancient saying without realising it.

**The Book of Genesis**

**Excerpts from Ch. 1.**

**1**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. **2**Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

**3**And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. **4**God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. **5**God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

**6**And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.” **7**So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. **8**God called the vault “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

**9**And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so. **10**God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good.

**11**Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. **12**The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. **13**And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

**14**And God said, “Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, **15**and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. **16**God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. **17**God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, **18**to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. **19**And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

**QUESTIONS**

1. The two texts above are examples of which of the following component of religion?

a. Ritual

b. The problem of evil and suffering (Theodicy)

c. Community

d. Myth

2. What is the geographic region and the time period in which the *Dīgha Nikāya*

(*Agganna Sutta*) was written?

a. 1st-5th century BCE, India

b. 1st-5th century BCE, China

c. 1st-5th century BCE, Greece

d. 1st-5th century BCE. Ancient Near East (Middle East)

3. What is the geographic region and the time period in which *The Book of Genesis* was

written?

a. 1st-5th century BCE, India

b. 1st-5th century BCE, China

c. 1st-5th century BCE, Greece

d. 1st-5th century BCE. Ancient Near East (Middle East)

4. Which of the following demonstrates the function of both narratives?

a. It provides people with ethical guidance through recounting of historical

events

b. It tells the story of the creation (origin) of the universe

c. It tells the story of sin and punishment

d. It raises theological and philosophical questions on the problem of evil and

suffering

5. What kind of theistic outlook does the *Book of Genesis* reflect?

a. Atheism

b. Dualism

c. Polytheism

d. Monotheism

6. What kind of theistic outlook does the *Dīgha Nikāya* reflect?

a. Nontheism

b. Dualism

c. Atheism

d. Monotheism