

RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT

PROGRAM REVIEW

SIX-YEAR REPORT

submitted September 9, 2010

**Religious Studies Department
Westmont College**

Six-Year Report 2003-2009
submitted September 9, 2010

1. Executive summary

The following statements represent the results of extensive study and departmental deliberation over the course of the 2007-2009 academic years. The process involved collaboration on writing and circulation of drafts, numerous departmental meetings both within and beyond the regular schedule, and substantial e-mail exchanges and conversations within the department. We also benefited extensively mid-cycle from feedback and direction from then-director of assessment Marianne Robins-Lemmond. Several RS majors and a recent RS alumnus were also instrumental in offering feedback and shaping our thinking.

1.A. *Mission and outcomes statements.* To summarize: The Religious Studies department at Westmont College offers the coursework, conversations, and experiences students need to gain competence in the study, understanding, and articulation of the Christian tradition in lively conversation with other traditions. Principal outcomes are hermeneutical competence, theological judgment, and ecclesial engagement. See 2.A. and 4.A.1 respectively for the full text of mission and outcomes.

1.B. *Summary chart.*

Major in Religious Studies			
Student Learning Outcomes/Goals	Hermeneutical Competence	Theological Judgment	Ecclesial Engagement
What do the Learning Goals mean?	Our graduates will be able to apply a range of skills in the interpretation of biblical and other religious literature.	Our graduates will understand the fundamental claims and logic of the Christian faith, appreciate the development of Christian theological traditions over time, and be able to think theologically.	Our graduates will be marked by a passionate commitment to the Christian church and its mission.
Departmental ownership (All goals were stipulated, discussed, and defined in departmental meetings through fall 2009.)	Primarily biblical studies; secondarily, all others.	Across all courses. Material is focused dogmatically in theology, historically in church history and historical theology, canonically in biblical studies, and cross-culturally and missiologically in missions and world religions.	Across all courses.
Where are the Learning Outcomes met?	In is in the nature of the major, comprising a range of subdisciplines, that learning is not introduced, developed, and mastered according to a linear sequence of courses, but through repeated exposure across diverse disciplinary topics encountered in a mainly unpredictable order. There are exceptions to this rule. The GE courses RS001-020 are introductory for many of these skills, while others are not introduced until upper-division courses. The Hebrew and Greek language courses follow a linear sequence of introduction-development with respect to narrow technical expertise. Finally, the RS180 capstone course presupposes a well developed level of understanding.		
How are they assessed?	Presently: Capstone written work, scored by rubric. Concluding focus group in capstone course. In the past: Alumni surveys. Departmental evaluation/discussion of written upper-division work.		
Benchmark	Benchmarks for each goal are articulated in the assessment rubric (see appendix 8.F).		
Link to the learning standards	Each goal meets aspects of all six learning standards.		

1.C. *Findings.*

1.C.1. The department articulated outcomes/goals for majors and GE courses. Both embedded assessment of student work and student self-assessment confirm consistently satisfactory progress and widespread satisfaction among RS majors.

1.C.2. Teaching loads are heavy, but department faculty teach, research, and serve at consistently high levels.

1.C.3. This six-year cycle has seen development of a new major, turnover of half of the department, successful adaptation to the new GE, expansion of global faculty reach and off-campus programs for students, and successful incorporation of assessment practices in the major.

1.D. *Next steps.*

1.D.1. The department will be concentrating in the next six years on implementing and adjusting the new major and minor structure and taking advantage of its opportunities for collaboration within the department and across the college's disciplines and divisions.

1.D.3. Levels of fatigue in the department are high, and sustaining current outcomes is emerging as a goal for our next six years.

1.D.2. Assessment instruments and procedures for RS GE courses yield valuable information, but can be improved to capture more intended departmental outcomes.

2. Departmental mission and role

2.A. *Mission.* The Religious Studies department at Westmont College offers the coursework, conversations, and experiences students need to gain competence in the study, understanding, and articulation of the Christian tradition in lively conversation with other traditions.

To that end, the Religious Studies major guides students:

- toward biblical literacy and growing skill in biblical interpretation enriched by interdisciplinary approaches and appropriately critical engagement with the history of interpretation;
- toward theological literacy and sound theological judgment marked by the ability to articulate clear and relevant theological convictions;
- toward familiarity with forms of Christianity worldwide with attention to historical and local identities of the Church in their social and cultural contexts; and
- toward strong faith in Jesus Christ and orthodox theology marked by a thoughtful and sustained commitment to the life of the Christian community and the disciplines and virtues that life requires.

2.B. We believe the department's contribution to the college's larger mission is well reflected in our RS GE student learning outcomes (see 5.A. below). Adapting that language, "The RS department contributes to the college's larger mission by establishing a common core of Christian knowledge and ways of thinking, and by providing a

foundation for fruitful conversation with and among all the disciplines of the liberal arts.”

2.C. *General Education contribution.* See 5.A. below.

2.D. *Recent history.* There are several especially noteworthy events in the department’s recent history:

First, at the beginning of our six-year cycle, the department was absorbing the impact of the college’s new General Education requirements: diminished RS GEs (moving from 16 to 12 required units), eligibility for the Common Inquiries areas of Thinking Historically and Thinking Globally, and Competent and Compassionate Action requirements with impacts on upper-division courses. The department restructured many upper-division courses in response.

Second, midway through the cycle, the college adopted a more sustained approach to assessment. The department has moved through two assessment cycles, adopting one set of approaches and then moving toward others as ramifications and results became apparent.

Third, a new major structure was adopted in 2008-2009 and implemented in 2009. The earlier major was structured as a core of breadth requirements and electives and a choice of tracks in biblical studies, theological and historical studies, missions, and world religions. These tracks appeared to insiders and outsiders to be more a legacy of several decades’ worth of earlier priorities than a coherent major that reflected the current strengths and goals of the department. Our new major features an expanded core that builds upon and rounds out the required RS GE courses and standardizes somewhat the list of courses we feel all majors should take. It turns formal tracks into softer concentrations, freeing students to move beyond courses in one area of concentration. It also returns from the earlier size of 52 units to the major’s historical size of 48 units. (See appendix 8.P for a summary of the new structure.) Finally, a major capstone course now brings together two faculty from across RS subdisciplines (usually one from biblical studies and one from outside biblical studies) to co-teach seniors in a seminar that fulfills the Integrating the Major Discipline GE requirement. These changes were made in response to issues such as those listed above, identified in the course of department-wide assessment of ‘actual student work’ in upper-division writing courses, in exit interviews of four graduating RS majors in 2008, in review of a recent alumni survey of RS majors, and in comparison with the major’s counterparts at 5-6 other colleges and specifically Wheaton College, coordinated by Shane Beninga, our departmental secretary at the time (see appendix 8.G). Early student response has been quite positive to these changes.

Fourth, the last several years have seen an expansion of off-campus Mayterms and semester programs, contributing both to the richness and life of majors and strengthening the global plank of Westmont’s five distinctives. Professors Farhadian, Fisk, Nelson, Reeder, and Rhee have all led students abroad, while Longman and Work have taught at other schools abroad as visiting scholars.

3. Basic statistical information about the program: discussion and analysis

3.A. Main achievements. The department has achieved a consistently strong conventional academic research program across our faculty, who have published monographs and edited volumes, critical commentaries, articles, chapters in edited volumes, and articles in the popular press; who serve on journals' and series' editorial staffs; who regularly give scholarly presentations at national, international, and regional conferences, and the like. Among the more unusual of these research projects include Reeder's project in site-specific research in reader hermeneutics in a diverse range of Christian communities, and Farhadian's 'testimonies project' of cultural anthropology and missiology in Papua. Department members teach not only at the college but as visiting and adjunct scholars in local and overseas graduate programs worldwide. Faculty members are involved in community service especially in churches and ministry organizations: teaching, serving in leadership and boards of trustees, giving presentations in churches and schools in Santa Barbara and around the world, participating in Westmont Downtown, in voluntarism outside the church (such as Nelson's chaplaincy, Fisk's work with Bread of Life, and Work's involvement in a local Boy Scout troop), and in social activities from an area polo club to networks of local community connections. Administrative service includes (besides the required committee work) Off-Campus Programs, the Global Initiatives task force, Diversity task force, Mission and Distinctiveness task force, and coordination of the college's honors program. In all these areas, our departmental culture fosters individual initiative and mutual support for independent engagement. We are proud of our own accomplishments and of one another's.

The department would like to improve in several areas: in having more conversations across our subdisciplines in front of students, helping them negotiate and even reconcile differences in our specialties and positions on issues; strengthening interdisciplinary collaboration with colleagues and with RS minors who are majoring in other disciplines; and in bringing guest speakers and teachers to the college.

3.B. Workload distribution. Workload is distributed differently, but none in our department are underworked. Some are more overworked than others, for a variety of reasons (personal scholarly commitments and research programs, teaching styles, institutional commitments and responsibilities, and teaching areas). Issues regarding workload distribution have been addressed informally, often through actions by the chair or provost. This approach has seemed sufficient to maintain satisfaction and collegiality, though we always need to remain sensitive to possible underreported issues.

3.C. Part-time teaching roles. Part-time teachers have been used almost entirely for sabbatical relief, though they are not unheard of for course releases. A number of RS faculty have also taught overloads and Mayterm courses. Our experience with part-time and adjunct teachers has been uneven and sometimes disappointing; it has been difficult to find qualified and gifted teachers whose stances are compatible with the college's convictions and mission and who also live within commuting distance of the college. We have preferred to teach in one another's cognate fields when possible (so Lee in

systematic theology, Rhee and Work in New Testament, Farhadian in theology, and so on).

3.D. *Diversity*. Two of eight RS faculty are women; three are ethnic minorities (two Asians and one Armenian). We have taken the following steps in the past few years, individually and departmentally to recruit diverse faculty (for specifics, see appendix 8.N, “Diversity and Recruitment in Religious Studies”):

- Focused advertising efforts encouraging women and minority scholars to apply.
- Increased attention to a wider variety of applicants for our last opening using telephone as well as live interviews (resulting in a strong and diverse interview pool and on-campus visits by one woman and one ethnic minority).
- Enhanced off-campus programs to bring students and ourselves into contact with global scholars and contexts in the course of their education.
- Teaching and presenting abroad, making close personal and professional relationships with people in our field worldwide.
- Hosted on-campus guests from around the world and from minority communities, including emerging scholars and a doctoral student.
- Engaged in collaboration and colloquia with individual faculty and groups with a variety of demographics, disciplinary backgrounds, and Christian traditions.

3.E. *Advising*. Advising load is not heavy, and is roughly equitable. Undeclared students are assigned disproportionately to faculty with lighter advising loads.

3.F. *Student gender and ethnicity*. Our majors are nearly as diverse as the Westmont student body: 13% between 2004-2005 and 2009-2010 (though small numbers in our majors mean large margins of error). Our graduates are 45% women, 55% men. The major itself seems hospitable to Westmont students across gender and ethnic categories. We do not know the reasons for the slight disparities between the Westmont body as a whole and RS majors.

4. Programs

4.A. Program Goals

4.A.1. *Student learning outcomes*. The department had adopted the following learning outcome goals for RS courses and the major, which were replaced in 2008:

- *Christian Orientation*
 - *Students will exhibit knowledge of OT, NT, doctrine, world religions, and history of Christianity*
 - *They will become familiar with skills appropriate to our disciplines (for example, textual, historical, and literary criticism of the Bible, theological analysis of important doctrinal debates, how to read primary and secondary sources for an understanding of church history, and approaches in comparative religion)*
- *Critical and Interdisciplinary Thinking*

- *Our majors will be able to analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and apply the information they confront*
- *They will demonstrate the ability to compare and contrast, to solve problems, and to recognize strengths and weaknesses in various positions, including their own*
- *Where appropriate, they will draw on the knowledge of other disciplines (such as science, philosophy, history, sociology, psychology, political science, linguistics, literature, and comparative religion)*
- *Oral and Written Communication*
 - *Students will be able to do careful research, using appropriate sources and methods to form opinions*
 - *They will then be able to articulate their positions clearly in papers, in oral presentations, and in class discussions, drawing reasonable conclusions from their reading and research*
- *Diversity*
 - *Graduates will be aware of a variety of viewpoints in biblical interpretation, theology, church history, and world religions*
 - *They will become more self-critical, recognizing that our beliefs are often influenced by our own social class, gender, ethnicity, and historical moment*
- *Active Societal and Intellectual Engagement*

Students will be challenged to grow in the practice of their faith (worship, church involvement, spiritual disciplines, prayer, seeking justice in society, living a life consonant with faith)

For most of the six-year report term, under the advice of our assessment coordinator the department focused on Christian orientation and critical thinking as matters of active assessment.

As the school's approach to assessment shifted, the department was encouraged to adopt a more concrete set of goals:

Hermeneutical competence

Our graduates will be able to apply a range of skills in the interpretation of biblical and other religious literature.

- *They will employ close reading skills with regard to primary sources: observation; inquiry; attention to genre, context, intertextuality, and literary influence; awareness of their own assumptions and cultural biases; awareness of audience(s) and effect on readers.*
- *They will display judicious use of scholarly resources (e.g., language tools, commentaries, monographs, journals, dictionaries, encyclopedias, electronic databases, library holdings, inter-library loan, web-based*

tools). They will acknowledge dependence and influence through appropriate notes and bibliography.

- *They will appropriate a range of critical methodologies (e.g., historical, literary, textual, rhetorical, socio-cultural), draw on insights across the range of relevant disciplines (e.g., linguistics; anthropology; sociology; philosophy; archaeology), and recognize the insights and pitfalls of various ideological approaches (e.g., post-colonial, feminist, Marxist).*

Theological judgment

Our graduates will understand the fundamental claims and logic of the Christian faith, appreciate the development of Christian theological traditions over time, and be able to think theologically.

- *They will faithfully interpret texts including the Bible and other primary sources in the worldwide Christian tradition.*
- *They will fairly evaluate the theological claims of secondary sources and current voices within and outside the Christian tradition.*
- *They will thoughtfully address intellectual and practical issues involving both narrowly theological matters and concerns in other disciplines.*
- *They will be acquainted with, and increasingly formed in, the practices that Christian theology serves including worship, fellowship, mission, study (especially of the Bible), and ethical conduct.*

Ecclesial engagement

Our graduates will be marked by a passionate commitment to the Christian church and its mission.

- *They will increasingly recognize connections between personal faith, scholarly inquiry, and the shared life of God's people in the world past and present.*
- *They will sense no conflict between rigorous intellectual inquiry, faithful service, and passionate worship.*
- *They will establish lifelong disciplines marked by theological reflection, Christ-like compassion, and robust engagement in the public square.*

Reeder and Lee developed assessment criteria for these outcomes, and the department used their rubric (see appendix 8.F) in spring 2009 to craft and evaluate summative written assignments in our trial capstone courses in Biblical Interpretation and Theological Interpretation.

4.A.2. Alignment with courses.

The standard matrix (“chart 5,” see 1.B) makes for a misleading guide to how RS courses align with outcomes because this learning is not introduced, developed,

and mastered according to a linear sequence of courses, but through repeated exposure across diverse disciplinary topics encountered in a mainly unpredictable order.

There are exceptions to this rule. The GE courses RS001-020 are introductory for many of these skills, while others are not introduced until upper-division courses. The Hebrew and Greek language courses follow a linear sequence of introduction-development with respect to narrow technical expertise. Finally, the RS180 capstone course presupposes a well developed level of understanding.

Hermeneutical competence is introduced in RS001 and RS010 and developed, and mastered primarily through Old Testament and New Testament courses (RS101-116, 154, 155, 158, 180, HB001-002, GRK001-151), and secondarily through all other RS courses, including RS-020.

Theological judgment can be taught topically as dogmatics (as in RS100, RS125-127, RS131, RS150, RS159), historically as church history and historical theology (as in RS119-123, RS150-151, RS157-RS158, RS160), and at the intersection of disciplines such as philosophy and the sciences or other religious traditions (as in RS129-130, RS133, RS150, RS137-139, RS142, RS165, and RS163). The prominence of the biblical texts in the outcomes here demonstrates that theological judgment is a secondary if not primary focus in biblical studies courses as well, though the approach there is primarily the text itself or its original historical context. Since topics have historical trajectories and cross-disciplinary ramifications, one course topic can include more than one of these aspects. Theological judgment is broadly introduced in RS20 and RS151 and developed primarily in the other courses mentioned here. Developmental courses that tend more towards mastery of theological judgment are RS180 and RS190.

Ecclesial engagement is strengthened and refined at introductory levels in RS001-020 and developed (as well as introduced in other aspects) pervasively across the RS curriculum. However, courses most directly focused on ecclesial engagement are RS113 and RS190. The capstone course (RS180) shifts focus somewhat on further strengthening ecclesial engagement after college.

At first, students become aware of these goals inductively. As they travel through the RS GE and major curricula, they absorb commitments to hermeneutical competence, theological judgment, and ecclesial engagement. We point these goals out from time to time, not systematically but as a topic's occasion allows. These experiences ready the students for us finally to make these goals explicit in their capstone course experience, which exposes them both implicitly and formally to our desired outcomes – especially in the final assignment and focus-group assessment. We know this because when they finally see those goals, their reaction is not surprise nor bewilderment but ‘Aha!’ and knowing smiles. We believe this strategy is more effective, more efficient, and more vitalizing than stating goals up-front again and again in our classes, because many of our

students have learned how to tune out such techniques by the time they come to college.

4.A.3. *Comparison with peer institutions.* Christian religious studies programs at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels worldwide generally share the following subdisciplinary areas: biblical studies (perhaps including biblical languages) in Old Testament and in New Testament, systematic (dogmatic or topical) theology, church history (sometimes including historical theology), philosophical theology and ethics (taught at Westmont in the philosophy department), and practical theology (church practices and ministerial training in worship, evangelism, spirituality, preaching, mission, and so on). Our major's breadth and specialization requirements reflect this broad consensus, with the exception (see 4.A.4) of practical theology. Overall areas of concern at these other schools broadly mirror our hermeneutical, theological, and ecclesial goal areas. However, Westmont's distinctives allow for deeper exposure across disciplines and in foreign contexts.

Departmental secretary Shane Beninga conducted a curriculum review of Wheaton College's Bible and Theology Department and led a departmental discussion comparing the two programs in fall 2007, as the department was revisiting the structure of the RS major. See appendix 8.G, "Curriculum Review."

Our majors are well enough prepared that they regularly pass out of introductory courses in their seminary and divinity school programs (for instance at Princeton Theological Seminary, Duke Divinity School).

4.A.4. *Co-curricular activities.* The major itself has no co-curricular activities other than discipline-specific practica and internship programs.

Some schools have a more deliberate ministerial focus than we have judged appropriate for our Christian liberal arts context; for instance, many Christian universities and colleges offer majors in areas as narrow as youth ministry, cross-cultural mission, and contemporary cultural engagement. Westmont's Christian distinctive, chapel program, local and international student ministries, and residence life program all give RS majors and other students adequate experience in these areas, allowing the RS major to focus on disciplined critical reflection on these practices (in RS100, for instance) as well as the classically 'theoretical' or academic ones.

4.B. Assessment of outcomes.

4.B.1. *Evidence.* Evidence assessing educational effectiveness includes:

- a. Student work in upper-division courses in Old Testament. These are reviewed in the 2006 report (appendix 8.Q) and stored in the RS secretary's office.
- b. Alumni surveys. These are analyzed and summarized in the 2006 report (appendix 8.Q) and stored in the RS secretary's office.
- c. Senior exit interviews with graduating RS majors from 2008 and earlier. Earlier interviews are among the campus-wide exit interviews conducted for several years during

this six-year period; 2008's are from surveys and a focus group of several graduating RS majors. These responses are located on the RS Department's Eureka page; tabulated responses are in appendix 8.O.

d. Final written assignments in spring 2009 capstone courses in Biblical Interpretation and Theological Interpretation, analyzed according to the RS outcomes rubric. The numeric evaluations are tabulated and recorded in appendix 8.H and stored in the RS secretary's office.

e. Concluding focus group conversation and surveys with spring 2009 capstone course students. These are tabulated and recorded in appendix 8.I.1-3 and stored in the RS secretary's office.

f. Faculty gather miscellaneous anecdotal evidence in conversations with students, in class discussions, in grading students' work, in self-reflection on coursework and teaching, in mandatory meetings with students, in research and interaction with colleagues at other institutions, in conversation with faculty outside our department, and in teaching experience at other schools both local and international. This 'embedded assessment' is not systematically gathered, scientifically evaluated, or even necessarily recorded. However, it is massive, and influential in the self-evaluation of our courses, our teaching careers, our students' progress, and our work together as a department. It guides the questions we ask, our stated and unstated goals for majors and GE education, and the innumerable small and large innovations that accumulate over the years in each of our teaching. While this information is tested, confirmed, and sometimes extended in evidence from formal assessment, it is fundamental and indispensable to our sense of achievement and failure and to setting directions for our individual careers and our departmental activities.

g. Faculty develop an 'ethic of assessment' and a 'culture of evidence' as our department engages in all these activities, but especially as the capstone course involves us as co-teachers in collecting, evaluating, and discussing information. This process is more effective for being gradual, shared between colleagues and across subdisciplines and years of experience, and integral to our teaching tasks.

4.B.2. *Analysis and conclusions.* Items a-c are analyzed in our 2006 report (appendix 8.Q).

Tabulation of items d-e and examination in departmental meetings, scheduled and held according to the plan in appendix 8.J, yielded observations listed along with the tabulations in appendix 8.H. Among the most significant observations were these:

-Ecclesial engagement is stronger than academic sophistication, strengthening the outcomes of especially the academically weaker students. This pattern (somewhat surprisingly) does not suggest a department whose academic focus overwhelms or destroys students' faith or spirituality. Indeed, it suggests that the department need not be bashful about its desires to strengthen academics and quality of logic further.

-Eighty-five percent of outcomes on individual items in our rubric score 'B' or higher, and all average scores are 'B' or higher. Because the department agreed in advance over the wording of the rubric's standards for evaluating outcomes, these results suggests an outcome we should find satisfactory, and we do.

-Our strongest majors are also our most liberal-arts-aware students, appealing in their work to other RS courses, other disciplines, and their larger Westmont curricular and extracurricular experiences. Courses should strive to strengthen these connections.

In examining the written assignments, the department found the outcomes assessment rubric to be helpful, accurate, and fairly used.

-Grades for the final projects closely track rubric scores, never deviating more than one-third of a grade. This suggests that both grades and rubrics give accurate assessments of students' overall performance and progress. It further implies real probative assessment value for RS course grades.

-Where grades differ from rubric scores, this happened as a strength or a weakness in one area of student performance loomed larger in the quality of the overall assignment. In other words, grades are better at valuing outsized deviations in certain aspects of student work: for instance, excellence or failure in a particular skill. Thus, while the rubric helpfully isolates discrete aspects of student work, it also flattens performance.

Capstone student surveys and focus group discussion showed the following:

-Faith and learning (integration) scores were higher and spiritual discipline lower than on evaluations of the students' written work. Students regarded their theological judgment more highly, and the overall quality of their written projects less highly.

-Here too, every average score was 'B' or higher, suggesting moderate or higher satisfaction among all RS majors.

-Students almost universally affirmed that the major prepared them to meet the department's learning goals.

-When asked which classes had been most helpful in accomplishing the RS department's identified goals, students offered a wide variety of answers. Coupled with overall satisfaction, this suggests a program with broad strengths.

-When asked in which areas the department had best prepared graduating students, the stronger-than-average areas were content and faith-and-learning. The weaker-than-average areas were in critical methodology and argument.

-Almost all would recommend an RS major to a fellow student.

When asked why students would recommend a Westmont RS major, they assessed the major as follows:

-Students consider Westmont's RS major to be superior to those of other schools.

-Students value the RS major for sharpening critical and interdisciplinary thinking skills – a goal articulated before 2006 as a specific desired learning outcome.

-These effects applied also to students' regard for scripture, which yielded a 'different trust' than the less informed trust that students entered with: more critical of proposed interpretations along with greater trust and love of the Bible and of God.

4.B.3. *Steps taken.* Evaluations of actual student work and student self-assessments were both quite positive for all the departmental learning goals of hermeneutical competence, theological judgment, and ecclesial engagement.

The department has no formal plans to communicate these results.

However, the department did publicize its new major structure, which was well received by students and faculty colleagues.

-The department's new major structure and course offerings already built on the results of earlier evaluation, both informal and formal (such as listed in the 2006 report, appendix 8.Q).

-Because of that recent change, immediate next steps will involve not radical changes but care taken to preserve the strengths of the major and department and continuing to assess student performance and progress.

Now that the rubric and course grades have been shown to correlate well, the department is willing to simplify the rubric from a 5-point to a 4- or 3-point scale and to keep evaluating written assignments in the capstone course.

Future courses, especially capstone courses, will pay more attention to the use of tools and technical academic skills, since hermeneutical competence needs to catch up to ecclesial engagement.

I. 5. General Education

II. 5.A. *RS GE student learning outcomes.* RS courses will constitute a center for the GE curriculum by establishing a common core of Christian knowledge and ways of thinking, and by providing a foundation for fruitful conversation with and among all the disciplines of the liberal arts. Our students will recognize that Christian faith is not an isolated mental or spiritual compartment, but that it takes shape within, and decisively shapes, personal, church, family, academic, and public life.

1. Students will know the content of the Old and New Testaments. (E.g., books, genres, literary structures, themes, stories, chronology, major characters, histories, and theologies.)
2. Students will understand interpretive approaches to both testaments in order to recover original meaning and subsequent significance of the biblical texts (for church, Kingdom, and wider world), taking into account historical backgrounds and critical issues.
3. Students will be able to identify the central doctrines of Christian faith and the forces shaping the history of global Christianity (e.g., major events, texts, and debates).
4. Students will have basic skills of careful reading and observation, critical thinking, analysis, and communication with respect to Scripture and other theological sources, and basic competence with a range of disciplinary tools.

5.B. *Evidence.* Evidence focused on biblical and theological literacy (goals 1 and 3 above). Pre- and post-tests were administered in RS001, RS010, and RS020. *Not all of the items on these tests are necessarily covered in class, though most are;* the department

has not sought to “teach to the test.” Results from early in our six-year cycle is described and analyzed in our 2006 report (appendix 8.Q). Results for spring 2008-spring 2009 (summarized in appendix 8.K.1-3) are below.

5.C. *Conversations.* The department met over several regularly scheduled department meeting times in fall 2009 to examine the tabulated results, analyze, and reflect.

5.D. *Conclusions.* For RS001, on a test of 37 content questions (appendix 8.K.1.a), scaled from 0 (no better than chance) to 1 (all correct), students moved from .27 to .54, closing 37% of the gap between ‘knowing nothing and knowing everything’ (so to speak). Literacy in historical and critical knowledge was lower at the beginning than literacy in Bible content (.21 versus .30) but caught up by the end of the semester (moving to .55 for both). See appendix 8.K.1.b.

For RS010, on a 26-question content test (appendix 8.K.2.a), students moved from .50 to .70, closing 39% of the gap. (Honors students moved from .69 to .84, closing 48% of their smaller gap.) The greatest movement was not in biblical literacy per se, which moved little, but in knowledge of historical context and conclusions of biblical criticism that are commonly known in the academy: Original literacy in historical and critical knowledge was much lower than literacy in Bible content (.37 versus .81 in the honors section, .25 versus .60 in regular sections), and didn’t quite catch up (.70 versus .89 in the honors section, .59 versus .74 in regular sections). Honors students came in knowing more, and closed more of the gap between that and knowing all the test answers, than students in regular sections. See appendix 8.K.2.b.

For RS020, on a long test with 13 content questions (first page of appendix 8.K.3.a), averages went from .4 to .65, closing 42% of the gap. (On the same test in spring 2009, results went from .45 to .61, closing 30% of the gap.) RS020 students in Work’s sections took a much longer test of 84 questions (all of appendix 8.K.3.a). Questions after the first 13 gauge students’ theological convictions, degrees of confidence in various statements, agreement with terms of identity (using language identical to Gallup polls on the subject, so our results can be compared with national and historical data), and habits of Christian practice. Results here were uneven too: Students’ strongest improvement came in Christology and ecclesiology, whereas there was less change in eschatology and doctrine of creation, and still less change in other major doctrines such as soteriology. Strong in-class emphasis on argumentation tended to be more effective in moving students towards historic Christian orthodoxy. Nevertheless, in sections of the test devoted to personal convictions on doctrinal matters, post-tests showed a persistent minority (20-25%) of “hold-outs” who refused to agree with orthodox positions. Doctrine students left somewhat more strongly embracing ‘evangelical’ identity. Their familiarity with key theological texts such as the Apostles’ Creed rose. However, the course had no marked immediate impact on spiritual practices such as Bible study, devotion, evangelism, and prayer. Finally, student satisfaction with Westmont grew (.71 to .86), closing half of the distance to universal satisfaction. See appendix 8.K.3.b, whose markings note the most significant findings.

It is hard to generalize from three different tests on three different subjects. Prior knowledge of certain OT and NT facts varies extremely widely, from complete ignorance on some questions to nearly universal prior awareness of others. So a different set of test

questions could make students look anywhere from extremely well informed of biblical content to entirely ignorant of it. Nevertheless, the pattern of these averages suggests, however weakly, that prior literacy is highest in New Testament, then in theology, then in Old Testament. Class-wide improvement in all three areas runs from 30-50% of what is possible. These rates of improvement appear to correlate reasonably well with what we faculty already know through exam and course grades (though course grades reflect assessment for more than mere factual literacy). The Doctrine course seems neither immediately beneficial nor immediately detrimental to students' Christian practices, though it has some positive impact on their orthodoxy and theological convictions.

5.E. *Changes.* It is good to see improved literacies, as well as some signs that RS GE courses are constructive rather than deleterious for students' ecclesial engagement and theological and hermeneutical competence.

The results of the Doctrine pre-post tests strengthened Lee's and Work's commitment to focus on training students for critical thinking according to orthodox Christian faith rather than simply teaching a doctrinal 'laundry list.' Because of the power of connections between course content and the rest of our students' lives, all RS GE courses will pursue closer ties between themselves and extracurricular events.

Some of our biblical studies faculty (specifically Longman and Fisk) have already been orienting their GE courses away from exclusive emphasis on content and critical literacies. Having examined the findings of the assessment instruments we adopted several years ago, the department generally agrees that we need an improved instrument that will capture more than just literacies, without the inordinate length of Work's pre-post tests. Maurice Lee is developing a pre-post test for Doctrine for fall 2010.

5.F. *Other developments.* Several important developments in GE courses are not captured in these assessment discussions and instruments. These include regular requests for additional GE sections in fall semesters for incoming first-year students, which put further pressure on course offerings for majors and other departmental activities; a move away from writing-intensive courses in Work's Doctrine sections because of growing extracurricular demands from the college; successful adaptation of upper-division courses to meet Common Inquiries and Competent and Compassionate Action requirements; and dissatisfaction with uneven quality in (hard to find) adjunct teachers for RS GE courses.

6. Financial and program resources

6.A. *Financial Resources.* Our practice in the RS department has been to work with the funds available and not to lobby for more. We have not reshaped our program goals to require a substantial influx of new money.

We have sought to implement a practice of providing a modest stipend for guest speakers in our classes. With more funding, we would seek to enrich our classes with additional guests lectures and more field trips. Beyond the classroom, we have discussed the idea of co-sponsoring interdisciplinary events and conferences for local Christian leaders and Christian high school students.

The RS budget (appendix 8.E) supports Farhadian's work as Book Review editor for the journal, *Missiology*. The verbal agreement with the Academic Dean is that money for his

student workers should come out of the departmental budget, with the Provost's office only providing support in the event that we exhaust our resources. This may not be the best arrangement for all parties and should probably be reevaluated.

6.B. *Program Resources.*

6.B.1. *Library.* The RS department has not been as involved or diligent in requesting and maintaining library resources as it should be. We have, however, researched the adequacy of our library holdings in some of our areas (see appendix 8.L). Morale is generally low with regard to the available resources for purchasing books and journals in our discipline, and department members have generally felt unable to devote the time required to assess the gaps and needs in our holdings. This needs to change.

Course syllabi in RS set assignments that require the use of textbooks, library resources, web-based databases, inter-library loan, and sometimes the use of the library at UCSB. The databases available on the library website are extremely valuable, with more and more full-text sources becoming available. For this the library staff is to be strongly commended. Occasionally professors have invited library reference staff to teach a seminar on library research.

6.B.2. *Internship Office.* The Mission of Westmont's Internship Program is to educate students in self-directed learning, faith integration, self-assessment, career exploration, and professional development, primarily in the context of a work setting. The mission further serves to raise students' awareness of issues of justice within a work or service context. Finally, it seeks to connect compatible resources within its community of students, faculty and employers.

The number of RS majors enrolled in practicum or internship since 2004, according the records kept by the Internships Office, is 21. These numbers do not include students who do internships for no academic credit, students doing internships in off-campus programs, summer and service opportunities.

	SP04-3
FA04-1	SP05-1
FA05-4	SP06-2
FA06-2	SP07-1
FA07-4	SP08-1
FA08-1	SP09-1
FA09-0	
<hr/>	
Total = 21	

Jennifer Taylor in the Internships office has been very supportive and eager to communicate with our department as a whole and with the department chair, internships liaison Curt Whiteman, and our students. Her network of local and regional contacts has been invaluable for students seeking practical ministry opportunities.

As a department we have not been aggressive to promote major-related internships, for reasons explained above (4.A.4). In terms of experiential education we have tended to emphasize off-campus study over ministry-related internships. The exception to this would be San Francisco’s Urban program. All RS majors who participate in the Urban program (13 students since 2005) complete an 8-unit internship as part of the core requirements of that program. The newly-revised RS curriculum tightens things slightly with respect to internship credit: Urban students can automatically earn 4 units of major credit for their internship, but must petition to earn 8 units. This is our way of ensuring that our majors select internships that are genuinely supportive of, and integrated with, their studies in Bible, theology and religion.

In the last two years, a local pastor, Kelly Soifer, has emerged as a skilled and experienced supervisor of summer church and parachurch-based internships. She is eager to coordinate her efforts with our Internships office. We are hopeful that RS majors are increasingly able to take advantage of opportunities to serve locally during the summers under her mentorship.

6.B.3. *Office of Life Planning.*

Every year the Office of Life Planning sponsors a seminary fair that brings to campus seminary representatives from across the country. The RS department has developed a resource (“Questions to Ask a Seminary”) to help students make the most of this opportunity. We also organize a dinner conversation immediately prior to the meeting at which several RS faculty tell their stories, offer advice and answer questions from majors who are considering seminary at some point in the future.

Beyond this formal event, all of us respond field questions regularly and throughout the year, from current students and alums, about seminary programs and admissions. Like our colleagues in other departments, we write our share of letters of recommendation, especially for students pursuing graduate studies in religion, theology and ministry. We regularly hear from alums in grad programs that their Westmont RS degree has given them substantial advantages over many of their peers.

6.B.4. *Off-campus programs.* Student participation in Off-campus programs has been solid, averaging 13 RS majors per year (including Mayterms).

05-06	5
06-07	20
07-08	13
08-09	12
09-10	15
[10 (fall)	4]

The attached table (appendix 8.M) provides a breakdown of programs by term.

Regionally, the most popular programs are:

- programs based in the **Middle East** (JUC, MESP, Westmont off-campus): 26 students

- Westmont's **San Francisco** Urban program: 13 students
- programs based in the **U.K.** (Oxford CCCU, Houghton in London, England semester, Ireland): 12 students

Given the obvious ties between the Middle East and Biblical studies, it is not surprising that RS majors are drawn to study in this region. But these numbers also reflect the fact that four RS professors (Fisk, Nelson, Reeder, Rhee) have been leading programs to this region in recent years, offering courses in direct support of the major. A fifth RS professor has been regularly leading high-quality programs to Asia. The department intends to continue providing leadership in off-campus programs and is excited to see how the president's Global Initiatives will provide even greater support for study abroad for our majors.

The department has maintained an active and ongoing presence on the Off-campus programs committee and had two invited representatives serve on the president's 2009-2010 Global Initiatives Task Force.

As explained above, the new RS curriculum no longer has required tracks. RS majors are not currently required to study off-campus, though we have considered adding this requirement and need to revisit this question in the coming years.

There is some concern, prompted by anecdotes and informal conversations with students, that some off-campus programs are less consistent with the goals of the major than others. We want our majors to participate in travel-study programs that foster global awareness without undermining students' faith. We have begun an effort to assess student growth with respect to the goals of the major by conducting an on-line survey of returning students and organizing formal focus-group conversations with them, as a whole group and separately by program.

6.B.5. *Associate Provost's Office – Reports.* In revising our major, the department found senior surveys conducted between 2004 and 2006, reported on collectively by the Associate Provost's Office, very helpful. This is especially true of the seniors whom RS faculty personally interviewed as part of the process.

The department also discussed May 2006's report on Experiences of Roman Catholic Students. Our Doctrine courses are deliberately critically appreciative of, and broadly positive toward, Roman Catholic doctrine and theology. This helps students of all traditions appreciate both the considerable strengths and the real problems of the Catholic theological tradition, as well as its deep commonality with Protestantism. This exposure trains students away from stereotyping and misrepresenting one another's traditions, brushing off longstanding disputes, and exaggerating differences.

The 2010 report on Spirituality and Religious Experience, conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA, offers an opportunity for the department to gauge some of the spiritual beliefs and affections of our students and respond constructively, especially in RS GE courses. It arrived too late in the academic year (April 2010) for departmental reflection, so we will meet to reflect on it (along with the

latest First-Year Student Survey Report) in 2010-2011 to assess how our courses might strengthen our students in relevant ways.

7. Conclusion and long-term vision

7.A. Accomplishments. The department has consistently taught, researched, published, and served the college, the church, and the community in ways we confidently feel represent Westmont at its best. In the past six years we have hired four outstanding colleagues: Farhadian, Rhee, Reeder, and Lee. We have adjusted to the new General Education requirements and (with some initial difficulties) adopted assessment procedures that confirm the quality of our program and suggest avenues for improvement we are already traveling. We have improved our major and minor programs. We have strengthened the major's and the college's off-campus program and have contributed especially to its Christian, global, diversity, and liberal arts distinctives.

7.B. Program improvement goals and strategies. We would like further to strengthen off-campus offerings, sharpen students' critical thinking in our major classes, and expose students to deeper and more sustained interdisciplinary thinking within our departmental specialties and across the liberal arts and wider academy. We need to attend to more dimensions of our GE students' academic and spiritual formation, if only in assessing more aspects of their progress. We need to settle into our new major and adjust course loads and faculty curricula as that may prove necessary. Since the RS program has been through major changes in this past six-year cycle, strategic importance is likely dominated by the short- to middle-term horizon rather than the long term.

7.C. Individual contributions. We have not assigned individual responsibilities for 'action items'. However, within our deliberate departmental culture of encouraging individual initiative for independent engagement in our various subdisciplinary circles, one specific area for identifiable individual contribution is in the new team-taught interdisciplinary capstone course, through which most RS faculty will rotate in the next few years and in which we will find opportunities for common experience and shared assessment and reflection.

8. Appendices.

- A. Profile of Full-Time Faculty**
 - 1. Profile of Full-Time Faculty**
 - 2. CVs**
 - 3. Sabbatical Report links**
 - 4. Professional Development Report links**
- B. Profile of Part-Time Faculty**
- C. Faculty Instructional Load**
- D. Number of Graduates over the Last Five Years**
- E. Departmental Budgets**
- F. Assessment Rubric for RS-180 Capstone Course**
- G. Curriculum Review: Wheaton Bible and Theology Department**
- H. Evaluation and Discussion of Student Work in Capstone Course**
- I. 1-3. Evaluation and Discussion of Capstone Course Focus Group**
- J. RS Six-Year Report Discussion Agenda for 2009-2010**
- K. 1-3. RS GE Pre/Post Tests and Tabulations**
- L. Library Christianity Collection Evaluative Report**
- M. Off-Campus Participation of RS Majors**
- N. Diversity and Recruitment in Religious Studies**
- O. RS Senior Assessment Focus Groups**
- P. RS Major Checklist**
- Q. June 15, 2006 Assessment Report**
- R. 1-11. Sample Evidence of Conversations**