



DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Department Writing Plan

Written by

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Submitted to

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Summary

Alison Downie served as the Religious Studies Department WAC liaison. She began meeting with Bryna Siegel Finer in Fall 2017 to draft a Department Writing Plan (DWP), using a template borrowed from the University of Minnesota¹ and adapted by Siegel Finer. Downie collected departmental syllabi and all members of the Religious Studies Department also gave her descriptions of their writing assignments for various courses.

Downie researched writing plans and faculty-authored writing guides to students hosted at various U.S. universities, as well as familiarizing herself with the published DWPs at the IUP WAC website.

Downie circulated her drafts of various sections of the DWP among faculty, prior to departmental meetings. She also brought aspects of the DWP to departmental meetings for further discussion. She incorporated this departmental input into meetings with Siegel Finer and into revisions to initial drafts, in order to reflect departmental consensus in the DWP.

During the process of developing the DWP, the department submitted major curricular revisions for approval through the Faculty Senate, and one faculty member left the department. A restructured curriculum and the loss of several courses, with the loss of a faculty member, means that this DWP will need to be updated soon after its completion.

At a meeting on November 9, 2019, the RLST faculty voted unanimously to support the Department Writing Plan as described below in addition to the WAC Director's recommendations for continuing program facilitation on pages 6 and 25 of this document.

¹ University of Minnesota Writing Enriched Curriculum. 2013. <http://wec.umn.edu/Writingplans.html>

Religious Studies Department Writing Plan Rollout Fall 2019

Professional and Academic Genres in Religious Studies

Academic publications by Religious Studies scholars span an enormous range of content, method and writing genres. The content of Religious Studies is inherently multicultural and global, as it examines religious traditions throughout history and across the globe.

Religious Studies is also interdisciplinary. Academic work in this field employs a variety of approaches as it investigates and analyzes religious cosmologies, symbols, myths, rituals, codes of conduct, experiences, communities, texts and so on. Religious Studies scholars have training in various disciplines in the humanities and social sciences; academic writing in Religious Studies demonstrates appropriately selected, consistent, knowledgeable use of a specific angle of analysis.

Because of this wide scope of content and approach, academic publications by Religious Studies scholars also span diverse writing genres, including but not limited to experiential narrative, fieldwork ethnography, textual study, and theoretical analysis.

The most important characteristics evident across this diverse scholarship are informed, critical analysis of one's topic, familiarity with established scholarship on the topic, and use of evidence to effectively support one's thesis.

The IUP Department of Religious Studies is committed to helping students in improving their writing skills toward the goal of being able to communicate as professionals in the field are required to do.

Student Writing Skills and Abilities

According to the 2014/2015 survey conducted by the American Academy of Religion,² approximately one third of Religious Studies majors are employed in religious organizations or in higher education. This means that two thirds of those graduating with a Religious Studies degree go on to careers in which the skills and aptitudes developed in undergraduate courses are transferred to a variety of professional contexts.

² <https://www.aarweb.org/outcomes-survey>

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As an undergraduate program, we are informed by and respond to this data in several ways. First, we introduce students to the wide range of approaches in the academic study of religion. Our curriculum develops students' religious literacy in a variety of traditions and thematic study, which necessarily includes a wide range of writing models in course material and types of assigned writing. Both in course content and in written responses to it, students develop breadth of understanding. Our curricular emphasis upon global diversity is reinforced by diversity of writing models and assignments. Students who anticipate entering a career upon graduation are well-served in gaining this broad foundation. Students learn to identify and describe differences of worldview. In their writing, students graduating from this major ought to demonstrate competency in key vocabulary and concepts such as myth, ritual, symbol, and so on in their writing.

Second, students are required to demonstrate their ability not only to understand, describe, and explain but also to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate course content in their writing. While written personal expression is appropriate for some assignments, students in this major learn to distinguish study of religion from proselytizing.

Critical thinking requires students to distinguish personal belief assertions from reflective responses to material which appeal to carefully elucidated evaluative criteria. At the higher skill levels, it also requires formal academic analysis which employs a specific theoretical approach to advance and support a thesis. Students will develop competency in diverse approaches most appropriate to specific contexts as they complete a variety of writing assignments with differing pedagogical goals. Increased self-awareness, for example, may be the goal of a writing assignment which requires personal response and reflection on a given topic. Assignments such as this ask students to become aware of perhaps hidden assumptions.

Third, student writing in this major ought to employ multicultural, gender, racial, ethnic, and/or class analysis at increasingly sophisticated levels. Students will learn that, though they may well be engaging in personal reflection through their course of study, and occasionally write personal responses to material, academic work in Religious Studies requires critical analysis of one's topic, familiarity with established scholarship on the topic, and use of evidence to effectively support one's thesis.

Students who achieve competency in all three aspects will graduate with skills transferable to many employment environments. Those students who achieve excellence in their written work at the more sophisticated levels of analysis are also well prepared for further academic study in graduate programs.

The IUP Department of Religious Studies is committed to introducing, emphasizing, and reinforcing these skills and abilities throughout the curriculum, and does so through the purposeful mapping of writing assignments and activities that follows in this document.

Integration of Writing into Undergraduate Curriculum

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The new course in method and theory of our discipline, required of all majors and minors (RLST 300) in our recently revised curriculum, was taught for the first time in Spring 2019. This course is an integral part of our department's curricular design. It establishes one writing assignment, a research paper, which will be required of all majors/minors who declare beginning in Fall 2018. While our upper-levels majors classes all require substantial writing, this research paper requirement in RLST 300 reflects our departmental emphasis upon critical analysis expressed in writing. Though students will complete this writing task at different stages of progress through our program, we anticipate that the consistency of this course assignment in this course material will greatly assist our departmental assessment process.

Communicating Writing Expectations to Students

Writing is essential in the discipline of Religious Studies and in the Religious Studies curriculum. We communicate this to our students in our classes and in the activities of our department. All our classes assign readings, ranging from very accessible required texts in the core classes (RLST 100, 110, and our anticipated 120) to very sophisticated and difficult material in the upper levels and seminar courses. Our classrooms always emphasize the importance of reading the assigned material as a basis for not only gaining accurate information, but also as prerequisite to further critical analysis. Our classes thus model the central place of writing in the academic study of religion by requiring students to read and respond to a range of material.

Students enter our program of study with varying levels of proficiency in reading and writing. We believe that these proficiencies are interrelated and expect that all students can improve these skills with direction, practice, and effort. Often our courses integrate these tasks, as when, for example, students must submit short written answers in response to questions designed to guide students in reading comprehension. We regularly distribute assignment sheets and rubrics to clearly communicate our expectations for various writing tasks.

Writing tasks for students are listed on each course syllabus in classes at the 200, 300, and 400 levels. Minors are required to take a minimum of six credits at the 300 level, and majors are further required to take at least one 400 level Special Topics course. In our upper level courses, written work constitutes a majority of students' semester grades, frequently even 100%. And as mentioned above, our curriculum revision implemented in Fall 2018 requires that all majors and minors take RLST 300, which will always require a research paper.

Many of us also, depending upon the assignment, use scaffolded deadlines, breaking down a project into steps to guide students through the writing process, particularly for longer or more difficult assignments. Sometimes upper level course exams are take-home, and sometimes they are completed in class (with or without access to outlines or class material, with or without advance distribution of the essay questions).

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Many of our courses require students to submit written work to the professor and share work with classmates in oral or visual presentations. These assignments integrate writing with clear communication in various media, such as power point, posters, and/or effective public speaking.

In addition to the emphasis upon writing in the classroom, our department emphasizes the integration of writing and critical thinking skills as transferable to numerous employment opportunities. We include material to this effect in folders distributed to all new majors and host a tri-annual career workshop. Although we have had to cancel it recently, we have an essay contest which we intend to run each spring, if we receive enough submissions. Normally, we give prizes to the top three essays and display the first prize student's name on a plaque in our hallway.

We also communicate the centrality of writing in the academic study of religion as we host events where students have opportunity to interact with scholars and published authors. Our department hosts programs each year, oftentimes bringing well known scholars to interact with students. We have a display in our hall of publications by our faculty, most of whom have published an edited volume or a single author work, in addition to articles in peer-reviews journals. This display models the centrality of writing in the professional lives of our faculty and makes our work easily accessible, should students wish to read it.

Lastly, department faculty include the following statement on their syllabi as an indicator to students of our commitment to their writing skills, as a prompt to begin conversation about writing expectations from the first day of class, and to ethically notify students that their work may be chosen for assessment purposes:

Syllabus Statement

Because writing is integral to the discipline of Religious Studies, our courses ask you to write a good deal. Because critical thinking is expressed and evaluated in written work, the Religious Studies Department regularly reviews student writing as part of our internal assessment. Any student writing produced in this course may be used for departmental curricular evaluation after all personal identifiers have been removed.

Implementation and Assessment of Department Writing Plan

The WAC Director recommends the following action items for continuing program facilitation:

- Elect at least one faculty member to continue to be the WAC/DEPT liaison (this should count as department Service)
- Provide all newly hired faculty a copy of the DWP, and recommending attendance at at least two WAC workshops or the May 2-day writing workshop for Liberal Studies faculty
- All faculty should add syllabus statement to their syllabi as appropriate

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- Add areas for the teaching and assessment of writing as goals on department and faculty five-year review documents
- Continue to update the writing outcomes curriculum map as courses are added, removed, and revised (and communicate these changes to the WAC Director)

Writing Outcomes Curriculum Map

The Religious Studies Department faculty has recently implemented curricular revisions and, in concert with this revision, has mapped out writing tasks appropriate to the educational context of each of our courses.

The Religious Studies Department serves the entire university with three core courses (RLST 100, RLST 110, anticipated RLST 120). These large, primarily lecture-based classes, taken by students to fulfill the PHIL/RLST graduation requirement, constitute a substantial portion of each faculty member's teaching load each semester. Since these courses are typically a student's first exposure to Religious Studies as an academic discipline, our majors/minors often enter our programs as a direct result of taking one of these courses.

These courses are vital to the university and to our program. Because these courses are large and demanding, our department upholds each faculty member's right to exercise her/his best judgment regarding use of writing in these courses. In these courses, our use of writing varies according to our pedagogical style with respect to effective teaching in a large lecture context. As a result, the writing tasks listed for these courses in the map below represent *a collective sampling* of strategies used by various faculty in various semesters. ***It is not our assertion or our expectation that any one faculty member would use any or all of these writing tasks in these three core courses.***

Our 200-400 level courses are more typically filled by our majors and minors as well as students who enroll because of interest in the topic. Some of these upper level courses are unique to a specific faculty member, while others may be taught by several faculty. In addition, we have two special topics designations (RLST 281 and RLST 481) which provide faculty with the flexibility to teach at two distinct levels in a topic of specialization or current research.

Writing is integrated in all our upper level courses. This map represents a fluid indicator of how we integrate writing tasks in our courses, with the understanding that we all revise standard assignments and design new ones, based upon our assessment of student ability, need, and pedagogical context. We believe that students are well served by our faculty's creativity in overall pedagogical design of courses and of specific writing tasks. Our department, therefore, understand this map to be a descriptive, working document rather than a proscriptive limitation to faculty creativity in course design.

The Writing Outcomes Curriculum Map demonstrates:

- Conscious effort on the part of department faculty at placing core disciplinary genres at appropriate levels of the curriculum, scaffolding and reinforcing the writing skills necessary for students to succeed in writing those genres (for example: RLST 300, which is required for all majors, includes a series of carefully sequenced deadlines as part of the research paper assignment to guide students through the process to completion).
- Thoughtful integration of writing-to-learn activities in most courses in the curriculum (for example: RLST 100 and RLST 110 may include short in class group writing activities; upper level courses generally require students to write summaries of or responses to assigned readings, in addition to a research or critical analysis project).
- Balanced measures for assessing writing as process and product, that is, writing is graded for demonstrating mastery of course content as well as improvement of writing skills over time (for example: All majors must complete one 400-level course; these courses typically include essay exams and/or an extended research/analysis project).

Course	Title	Writing Activities Write to Learn (WTL) and Writing to Communicate (WTC) Writing assignments may include some selection of:	Purpose	Introduced, Reinforced, or Emphasized	Genres modeled through reading
100	Introduction to Religion (F2F)	Short answer questions on exams (WTC); Descriptions of key theoretical perspectives (WTC); short quizzes (WTC); poster presentations (WTC); Power Point presentations (WTC)	Employ and synthesize ideas in the academic study of religion	Introduced	Scholarly articles, popular articles, textbook, websites
		Short in class writing assignments (WTL); short written homework assignments (WTL); online discussions (WTL); responses to videos (WTL); directed note taking in class	Practice expressing themselves in writing; using writing as a tool to think critically	Introduced	Scholarly articles, popular articles, textbook, websites

		Short answers on quizzes and exams (WTC)	Ability to answer questions in a clear manner	Introduced	Scholarly articles, popular articles, textbook, websites
		Descriptions of key theoretical perspectives in the study of religion (WTC)	Respond to questions addressing reading content	Introduced	Scholarly articles, popular articles, textbook, websites
110	World Religions (online)	Short answer questions on exams (WTC); Descriptions of key theoretical perspectives (WTC); short quizzes (WTC); Power Point presentations (WTC)	Employ and synthesize ideas in the academic study of religion	Introduced	Scholarly articles, popular articles, textbook, websites
		Short writing assignments (WTL); homework assignments (WTL); discussion boards (WTL); responses to videos (WTL)	Practice expressing themselves in writing; using writing as a tool to think critically	Introduced	Scholarly articles, popular articles, textbook, websites
		Short answers on quizzes and exams (WTC)	Ability to answer questions in a clear manner	Introduced	Scholarly articles, popular articles, textbook, websites
		Short answers on quizzes and exams (WTC); descriptions of key theoretical perspectives in the study of religion (WTC); short writing assignments (WTL)	Respond to questions addressing reading content	Introduced	Scholarly articles, popular articles, textbook, websites
110	World Religions (F2F)	Directed note taking during lectures (WTL)	Learn to focus attention; increase awareness of learning process	Introduced	

		Short answer questions on exams (WTC); Descriptions of key theoretical perspectives (WTC); short quizzes (WTC)	Employ and synthesize ideas in the academic study of religion		
		Short homework assignments (WTL, WTC)	Practice using concepts and vocabulary; using writing to develop critical thinking	Introduced	Textbook, videos of religious rituals, excerpts of sacred texts, short current events reporting in news media
RLST 120	Comparative Religious Ethics	Short homework assignments (WTL)	Practice summarizing, defining, reporting in order to learn key concepts	Introduced	Textbook, video clips, scholarly articles, written reports in news media
		Short responses on quizzes and exams (WTC)	Demonstrate understanding of key concepts in clear writing	Introduced	All class material; this may include textbook, supplemental reading, videos
		Class presentations (WTC)	Practice expressing themselves to fellow students		All class material and minimal independent research: textbook, supplemental reading, news media and websites
RLST 245	Women and Religion	Short answer questions on exams (WTC); short quizzes (WTC);	Assess understanding of course reading	Reinforced	Textbook, case studies, scholarly essays in theory and analysis, first person accounts
		Descriptions of key theoretical perspectives (WTL);	Develop ability to use theory in analysis of specific cases	Introduced and reinforced	

		Class presentations (WTC)	Independent learning and communication to peers	Introduced and reinforced	
		Short papers (WTL)	Explain and analyze key ideas and positions taken in course readings	Introduced and reinforced	
RLST 300	Methodologies in Religious Studies	Essay questions on exams (WTC);	Demonstrate understanding of key terms and concepts	Reinforced and emphasized	Scholarly articles; primary texts from influential theorists in Religious Studies
		Short writing assignments in response to assigned readings (WTL);	Accurately explain and interpret scholarly theory in assigned academic essays	Reinforced, introduced, and emphasized	
		Research paper (WTL and WTC)	Employ theory to analyze an aspect of a religious tradition (ritual, symbol, belief, etc.)	Introduced reinforced, and emphasized	
RLST 311	Eastern Philosophy	Essay questions on exams (WTC);	Demonstrate understanding of key terms and concepts in class material	Introduced reinforced, and emphasized	Textbook; scholarly articles; primary texts of key figures in selected traditions
		Research paper (WTL & WTC)	Independent research and critical analysis of a specific practice, community or thinker	Reinforced and emphasized	
RLST 329	Philosophy of Religion	Short written responses to assigned readings (WTL)	Accurately explain the thesis and support of it in assigned reading	Reinforced	Textbook; excerpts of primary texts by influential thinkers in the discipline; scholarly articles from

					discipline specific journals
		Essay exams (WTC)	Demonstrate understanding of key terms, thinkers and concepts in class material; demonstrate ability to distinguish among various theoretical approaches and corresponding arguments	Reinforced and emphasized	
		Research paper (WTL & WTC)	Independent research on a specific thinker or within a specific theoretical camp; interpret, synthesize and/or analyze primary source material	Reinforced and emphasized	
RLST 345	Women in the Bible	Short written responses to assigned readings (WTL)	Accurately explain the thesis and author's support of it in assigned reading	Reinforced	Textbook; excerpts of primary texts by influential thinkers in the discipline; scholarly articles from discipline specific journals
		Essay exams	Demonstrate understanding of key terms, thinkers and concepts in class material; demonstrate ability to distinguish among various theoretical approaches and corresponding arguments	Reinforced and emphasized	

		Research paper (WTL & WTC)	Independent research on a specific thinker or within a specific theoretical camp; interpret, synthesize and/or analyze primary source material	Reinforced and emphasized	
RLST 365	Native North American Religions (cross listed Anthro 365)	Short written responses to assigned readings (WTL)	Accurately explain the thesis and author's support of it in assigned reading	Reinforced	Textbook; excerpts of primary texts by influential figures in the discipline; scholarly articles from discipline specific journals
		Essay exams (WTC)	Demonstrate understanding of key terms, figures and concepts in class material	Reinforced and emphasized	
		Research paper (WTL & WTC)	Independent research on a specific thinker or within a specific theoretical camp; interpret, synthesize and/or analyze primary source material	Reinforced and emphasized	
RLST 370	Religions of China and Japan	Short written responses to assigned readings (WTL)	Accurately explain the thesis and author's support of it in assigned reading	Reinforced	Textbook; excerpts of primary texts by influential figures in the discipline; scholarly articles from discipline specific journals
		Essay exams (WTC)	Demonstrate understanding of key terms, figures and concepts in class material	Reinforced and emphasized	

		Research paper (WTL & WTC)	Independent research on a specific figure or specific community; interpret, synthesize and/or analyze primary source material	Reinforced and emphasized	
RLST 373	Buddhism	Short written responses to assigned readings (WTL)	Accurately explain the thesis and author's support of it in assigned reading	Reinforced	Textbook; excerpts of primary texts by influential figures in the discipline; scholarly articles from discipline specific journals
		Essay exams (WTC)	Demonstrate understanding of key terms, figures and concepts in class material	Reinforced and emphasized	
		Research paper (WTL & WTC)	Independent research on a specific figure or specific community; interpret, synthesize and/or analyze primary source material	Reinforced and emphasized	
RLST 375	Religions of India	Short written responses to assigned readings (WTL)	Accurately explain the thesis and author's support of it in assigned reading	Reinforced	Textbook; excerpts of primary texts by influential figures in the discipline; scholarly articles from discipline specific journals
		Essay exams (WTC)	Demonstrate understanding of key terms, figures and concepts in class material	Reinforced and emphasized	

		Research paper (WTL & WTC)	Independent research on a specific figure or specific community; interpret, synthesize and/or analyze primary source material	Reinforced and emphasized	
RLST 378	Hinduism	Short written responses to assigned readings (WTL)	Accurately explain the thesis and author's support of it in assigned reading	Reinforced	Textbook; excerpts of primary texts by influential figures in the discipline; scholarly articles from discipline specific journals
		Essay exams (WTC)	Demonstrate understanding of key terms, figures and concepts in class material	Reinforced and emphasized	
		Research paper (WTL & WTC)	Independent research on a specific figure or specific community; interpret, synthesize and/or analyze primary source material	Reinforced and emphasized	
RLST 380	Islam (F2F or online)	Short written responses to assigned readings (WTL)	Accurately explain the thesis and author's support of it in assigned reading	Reinforced	Textbook; excerpts of primary texts by influential figures in the discipline; scholarly articles from discipline specific journals
		Essay exams (WTC)	Demonstrate understanding of key terms, figures and concepts in class material	Reinforced and emphasized	

		Research paper (WTL & WTC)	Independent research on a specific figure or specific community; interpret, synthesize and/or analyze primary source material	Reinforced and emphasized	
		Discussion boards (WTL) may also be used when offered online			
RLST 385	Christianity	Short written responses to assigned readings (WTL)	Accurately explain the thesis and author's support of it in assigned reading	Reinforced	Textbook; excerpts of primary texts by influential figures in the discipline; scholarly articles from discipline specific journals
		Essay exams (WTC)	Demonstrate understanding of key terms, figures and concepts in class material	Reinforced and emphasized	
		Research paper (WTL & WTC)	Independent research on a specific figure or specific community; interpret, synthesize and/or analyze primary source material	Reinforced and emphasized	
RLST 388	Interpreting the Bible	Short written responses to assigned readings (WTL)	Accurately explain the textbook presentation of historical/literary context of a biblical text	Reinforced and emphasized	Textbook; scholarly articles from discipline specific journals; news articles; selected passages from the Bible in various English

					translations
		Essay exams (WTC)	Demonstrate understanding of key terms and concepts in class material	Reinforced and emphasized	
		Research paper (WTL & WTC)	Independent research on a specific biblical passage or figure; demonstrate ability to analyze/critique/interpret the text using secondary sources	Reinforced and emphasized	
		Presentation of research to the class (WTC)			
RLST 401	Topics in Abrahamic Religions	Short written responses to assigned readings (WTL)	Accurately summarize &/or explain assigned readings	Reinforced and emphasized	Textbook; scholarly articles from discipline specific journals; news articles
		Essay exams (WTC)	Demonstrate understanding of key terms and concepts in class material	Reinforced and emphasized	
		Research paper (WTL & WTC)	Independent research on a specific topic or key thinker; demonstrate ability to analyze/critique/synthesize ideas using secondary sources	Reinforced and emphasized	
		Presentation of research to the class (WTC)			

RLST 402	Topics in Asian Religions	Short written responses to assigned readings (WTL)	Accurately explain the thesis and author's support of it in assigned reading	Reinforced	Textbook; excerpts of primary texts by influential figures in the discipline; scholarly articles from discipline specific journals
		Essay exams (WTC)	Demonstrate understanding of key terms, figures and concepts in class material	Reinforced and emphasized	
		Research paper (WTL & WTC)	Independent research on a specific figure or specific community; interpret, synthesize and/or analyze primary source material	Reinforced and emphasized	
RLST 403	Topics in Indigenous Religions	Short written responses to assigned readings (WTL)	Accurately explain the thesis and author's support of it in assigned reading	Reinforced	Textbook; excerpts of primary texts by influential figures in the discipline; scholarly articles from discipline specific journals
		Essay exams (WTC)	Demonstrate understanding of key terms, figures and concepts in class material	Reinforced and emphasized	
		Research paper (WTL & WTC)	Independent research on a specific figure or specific community; interpret, synthesize and/or analyze primary source material	Reinforced and emphasized	

RLST 480	Seminar in Religious Studies (Honors Seminar)	Short written responses to assigned readings (WTL)	Accurately explain the thesis and author's support of it in assigned reading	Reinforced	Textbook; excerpts of primary texts by influential figures in the discipline; scholarly articles from discipline specific journals
		Essay exams (WTC)	Demonstrate understanding of key terms, figures and concepts in class material	Reinforced and emphasized	
		Research paper (WTL & WTC)	Independent research on a specific figure or specific community; interpret, synthesize and/or analyze primary source material	Reinforced and emphasized	
RLST 485	Topics in Feminist Study of Religion	Short written responses to assigned readings (WTL)	Accurately explain the thesis and author's support of it in assigned reading	Reinforced	Textbook; excerpts of primary texts by influential figures in the discipline; scholarly articles from discipline specific journals
		Essay exams (WTC)	Demonstrate understanding of key terms, figures and concepts in class material	Reinforced and emphasized	
		Research paper (WTL & WTC)	Independent research on a specific figure or specific community; interpret, synthesize and/or analyze primary source material	Reinforced and emphasized	

Appendix A -- Senior Writing Assessment, Protocol and Rubric

Protocol

The department uses this research paper assigned in the required course, RLST 300, to assess student writing.

The faculty member teaching RLST 300 (Methodologies of Religious Studies) is excluded from the assessment process to preserve the blinded nature of the assessment. Guidelines from that professor's section appear below.

The faculty member teaching RLST 300 (Methodologies of Religious Studies) copies research papers written by seniors prior to making comments or grading marks on the papers and gives these blinded copies in digital format to Dr. Downie. Dr. Downie attaches the departmental rubric (below) to a hard copy of each student paper for three other faculty members to complete independently.

Dr. Downie then gave the completed rubrics to WAC Director, Dr. Siegel Finer, who provided statistics and analysis, and whose report appears in Appendix B, below.

Research Paper Guidelines

Rough Draft

Your rough draft must be completed (a full 8-10 pages plus your bibliography) in order to receive full points. Please make sure your name is on this draft. At this stage, there should be evidence that you made adjustments to your paper based on my response/suggestions in your paper outline. Details about expectations for your final paper, including formatting and content, can be found below under "Final Paper".

Peer Edit

Separate guidelines will be given to you for how to conduct a peer edit. The act of peer editing another person's paper is worth 5%. As a peer editor, please make sure to put your name on the rough draft of the paper you are editing so that you are graded accordingly. As a recipient of these editorial suggestions, please take these peer edits seriously—while you do not have to adopt everything a peer editor suggests, chances are that there are some things that you should do in order to create a better final product.

Final Paper

In order to successfully complete this assignment, this typed research paper should be 8-10 pages in length, double-spaced, and in 12 font. All direct and indirect quotes should be cited consistently using MLA or Chicago formatting.

Your paper should include a title page, including your name, student number, and date, as well as an appropriate title for your paper that relates to your topic (it is recognized that MLA formatting does not require a title page—however, even if you do use MLA, you must do so in this instance). You must also include, on a separate page, a bibliography of the sources you used for your paper. Please see Purdue OWL (https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/resources.html) for all your formatting needs. The title page and bibliography do not count towards the required length of your paper.

Research

You must use at least **three** academic sources to support your arguments in your paper, not including sources used from your required reading list. You may also use additional sources, either from the course readings or otherwise. Some of you may want to draw from popular media, including newspapers, magazines, and the internet. These sources of information should only be used in addition to your four academic sources—popular media should not be your primary source of research.

In general, please refrain from using non-academic websites as sources of information. Academic E-journals are acceptable, but Wikipedia is not. If you are unsure whether your sources are appropriate, please contact me.

Structure

Your paper must include the following:

- a) Title page – your paper’s title, the course title and course #, your name and student id #, as well as the date.
- b) Introduction – thesis, a brief on how your thesis will be proven, reasons your paper is needed
- c) Body – arguments that support your thesis
- d) Conclusion – summary of thesis and main points
- e) Bibliography – list of sources used, including the author, title of source, publisher, place of publication and date. For internet sources, you must also include the internet site and the date the website was accessed.

Quotations

Quotations are used to support arguments or claims, and indicate information taken from your sources. They should not be used to *make* a claim, but instead should be used to enhance your own arguments. This means that you should only quote information that is directly related to your arguments. All quotes, direct and indirect, must be cited properly and consistently.

Direct quotes

Direct quotes are used when a sentence(s) are used word for word from another text. They must be enclosed in quotation marks to indicate a short direct quote, or indented and separated from the body of your own work to indicate a long direct quote. A long quotation is any quote that is more than three lines long. Direct quotes may include a whole paragraph, sentence, or part of a sentence.

Indirect quotes

Indirect quotes do not require quotation marks but do require citation indicating where the information was obtained. An indirect quote might be the rewording of a sentence or a summary of ideas of a scholar or text, both of which need to be cited. If you are unsure whether or not to cite the material, always cite it. It is plagiarism if you do not cite material that you are using.

This assignment provides a recurring, required substantial project on theoretical material. It thus offers us the opportunity to assess the three key traits most important for our students, as explained above: critical analysis of one's topic, familiarity with established scholarship on the topic, and use of evidence to effectively support one's thesis.

Papers written by graduating seniors are blinded; each faculty member uses the same rubric (below) to score the writing achievement of the paper. Scores are combined to calculate the average score. This information is used going forward to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses in students' writing abilities. Depending upon our findings, our assignments in other upper level courses may be adjusted or refined. We expect to offer RLST 300 bi-annually and thus, going forward, we will regularly have a group of papers produced by our majors to evaluate.

Rubric

(correlated to Desired Writing Abilities above)

Scoring: 4 = Above average
 3 = Acceptable
 2 = Below average
 1 = Poor
 N/A = Not applicable

Desired Ability	Score
Accuracy of fact in presenting an aspect of a religious tradition (e.g., belief, ritual, symbol, etc.)	
Explaining the meaning of the facts regarding an aspect of a religious tradition; demonstrating a good understanding of the selected dimension, beyond reportage	
Effective use of a critical method to analyze an aspect of a religious tradition's belief, practice, etc.	

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Persuasive evaluation of an aspect of a religious tradition with evidence to support the thesis	
Organization effective for the content and purpose	
Grammar and mechanics demonstrate careful revising and editing	

Appendix B – Results of Senior Assessment

Results

The Spring 2019 data are considered “baseline” results from the first assessment of 6 student writing samples from one section of RLST 300.

Areas in which student writing is above expectations (77+)

Holistic

year	Above Average/Acceptable	Below Average/Poor
Spr 2019 n = 6	100% (33% / 66%) 6 (2 / 4)	0

Criterion 1: Accuracy of Information/Content

year	Above Average/Acceptable	Below Average/Poor
Spr 2019 n = 6	100% (50% / 50%) 6 (3 / 3)	0

Criterion 2: Comprehension of Information/Content

year	Above Average/Acceptable	Below Average/Poor
Spr 2019 n = 6	100% (33% / 66%) 6 (2 / 4)	0

Criterion 3: Use of Critical Method for Analysis

year	Above Average/Acceptable	Below Average/Poor
Spr 2019 n = 6	100% (17% / 83%) 6 (2 / 5)	0

Criterion 5: Organization

year	Above Average/Acceptable	Below Average/Poor
Spr 2019 n = 6	100% (33% / 67%) 6 (2 / 4)	0

Criterion 6: Grammar and Mechanics

year	Above Average/Acceptable	Below Average/Poor
Spr 2019 n = 6	83% (33% / 50%) 5 (2 / 3)	17% (17% / 0) 1 (1 / 0)

Areas in which student writing is meeting expectations (68-77)

None

Areas in which student writing is below expectations (67 and below)

Criterion 4: Evaluation and Use of Evidence for Support

year	Above Average/Acceptable	Below Average/Poor
Spr 2019 n = 6	66% (33% / 33%) 4 (2 / 2)	33% (33% / 0) 2 (2 / 0)

Analysis

Because it is required of all majors, the RLGS 300 course is the best chance to get a writing sample from all students majoring in Religious Studies close to the end of their junior or senior year. However, the sample size from that course is always likely to be small, as it is from this baseline presented above (six students). Thus, the results of the assessment are likely to be somewhat skewed (for example, although it appears above that students are struggling with evaluating and using evidence for support, in this sample, only two of the six were indeed rated as below average in that criterion; nevertheless, those two students are 33% of the sample).

From this sample, we can extrapolate that students are exceeding department expectations in all criteria except “Persuasive evaluation of an aspect of a religious tradition with evidence to support the thesis,” where we see scores more evenly across the rubric levels with at least a few receiving “below average” scores. As using evidence to support a thesis is, arguably, one of the most important communicative and critical thinking skills students should have when they leave college, we’d want to think about ways to support students’ improvement in this area.

Recommendations from the WAC Director

Over the next two years (until the next writing assessment), faculty might discuss ways to enrich more of their courses and scaffold earlier coursework (200-level) with activities that teach students how to support their ideas, whether in formal thesis-driven assignments or in informal writing like journals or in-class free-writing. As a group, the department faculty could develop a sequence for how persuasion and evidence-based writing is taught throughout the major tracks so that by senior year, students are more confidently evidencing its application.

Upper-level students in Religious Studies are clearly strong writers. Ideally, as seniors graduate from programs at IUP, we’d like the majority of them to exceed expectations in all criteria. In particular, faculty in RLGS could look at criteria like “Effective use of a critical method to analyze an aspect of a religious tradition’s belief, practice, etc” and “Organization effective for the content and purpose,” where although the total number of students are above expectations, more than half of the students are *meeting* expectations rather than *exceeding*. These, too, are concepts that could be scaffolded earlier in students’ coursework, the latter especially by encouraging students to go to the Writing Center. The WAC program could also facilitate professional development for faculty who are interested in developing ways to teach these concepts specifically in the context of their courses.