Assessing Learning Outcomes and Degree Paths in the Religious Studies MA Program

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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Learning Outcomes Review

EXISTING MSU REL MA STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Students will develop advanced knowledge in one or more scholarly fields in the study of religion.

- Students will utilize theories and methods appropriate for graduate research in the study of religion.

- Students will demonstrate critical thinking, analytical, and interpretive skills appropriate for graduate research in religion.

- Students will communicate effectively both orally and in writing.

Data Discussed

COMPARISON WITH OTHER STAND-ALONE REL MA PROGRAMS IN STATE UNIVERSITIES

- Team researched and discussed SLOs/program descriptions from 13 other programs

- Other programs haphazardly imply some SLOs in program descriptions but don't systematically and clearly articulate them.

- Undergraduate programs are more frequently intentional about articulating SLOs than graduate programs.

Conclusions Reached

- Our existing SLOs are a good start but should be more detailed and example rich in terms of the subjects, methods, and skills to be mastered.

- Some Religious Studies undergraduate program SLOs provide good examples for emulation.

- Our efforts to provide more specificity in SLOs will contribute to the development an effective exit survey/interview for program assessment.

- Our department could become a leader in promoting the importance of clearly articulating SLOs for Religious Studies MA programs

Degree Paths Review

EXISTING MSU REL MA PATHS

- Students can do a thesis or a research portfolio.

- All students take comprehensive exams that emphasize breadth of knowledge—multiple subject areas—in the study of religion.

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Data Discussed

COMPARISON WITH OTHER STAND-ALONE REL MA PROGRAMS IN STATE SCHOOLS

- The team researched and discussed degree paths of the other programs, esp. w/regard to comprehensive exams
  - Programs that require a thesis of everyone and no comps: 1
  - Programs that require a thesis or more electives and no comps: 1
  - Programs that require a thesis or more electives and comps: 5
  - Programs that require a thesis or a research portfolio and no comps: 2
  - Programs that require a thesis or a research portfolio and comps: 2

Conclusions Reached

- We need to do something. ☺

- We might want to drop comps for thesis track students or everyone.

- More consensus emerged on modifying the comprehensive exam by making it field specific rather than general.

- A field specific comp would actually contribute to thesis or research portfolio prep.

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Item(s) Chosen for Action

1. Modify SLOs

2. Modify Comps

Follow-up Plans & Next Steps

- The department Graduate Studies Committee will continue discussing these items in FA20/SP21 and present recommendations to the department's graduate faculty.

- A graduate committee member, Pippa Koch, will apply for an assessment grant in pursuance of these goals.

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