

2012-2013 M.A. in Religion Academic Assessment Plan

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
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Office of the Provost

*University of
Florida*

*Institutional
Assessment*

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Enhancement*

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Academic Assessment Plan for M.A. in Religion

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

A. Mission

The mission of the **MA program** in the Department of Religion is:

- To train the students to develop the ability to articulate orally and in writing the results, significance, and applications of their scholarship and research.
- To train the students to develop the ability to become effective teachers-scholars at research universities, teaching colleges, and other equivalent educational institutions in their particular sub-fields, as well as in the broad field of comparative religions.
- To train the students to develop the ability to produce original research and scholarship that meets the professional standards of the academic study of religion.

This aligns with the **Department of Religion's** mission, which is to train students in the rigorous, comparative, and interdisciplinary study of religions in their multiple expressions and human dimensions, including their cultural, social, political, historical, literary, and ethical aspects, as well as their relations with the environment. Currently, the doctoral program focuses on three areas of scholarly research and teaching and their synergies: religions of Asia, religion in the Americas, and religion and nature.

This aligns with the **College of Liberal Art and Sciences'** mission, which is to lead the academic quest to understand our place in the universe, and to help shape our society and environment. The College pledges to ensure equitable access for all of its constituencies present, drawing strength from our rich heritage of racial, ethnic and gender diversity. Through teaching, research and service, the College continually expands our knowledge and practice in the most fundamental questions in the arts, humanities, social sciences, and natural and mathematical sciences.... As a public institution, the College serves society through its research programs to advance our knowledge and capabilities, through its teaching to prepare tomorrow's leaders, and through its outreach programs to ensure dissemination of the state of the art in areas ranging from languages and literatures, to social behaviors, to the fundamental laws of nature. The College captures the brightest ideals of intellectual inquiry and human values mirrored in society, and remain ever conscious that it must represent and reflect all segments of society to remain the intellectual core of the university.

This also aligns with **University of Florida's** mission, which is to offer broad-based, exclusive public education, leading-edge research and service to the citizens of Florida, the nation and the world. The fusion of these three endeavors stimulates a remarkable intellectual vitality and generates a synthesis that promises to be the university's greatest strength. The university maintains its dedication to excellent teaching and researching by creating a strong and flexible foundation for higher education in the 21st century. The university welcomes the full exploration of our intellectual boundaries and supports our faculty and students in the creation of new knowledge and the pursuit of new ideas. Teaching is a fundamental purpose of this university at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Research and scholarship are integral to the education process and to the expansion of our understanding of the natural world, the intellect and the senses. Service reflects the university's obligation to share the benefits of its research and knowledge for the public good.

B. Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment Measures

SLO Type	Student Learning Outcome	Assessment Method	Degree Delivery
Knowledge	SLO 1: Students will identify, define, and describe classical and contemporary methods and theories in the study of religion and the sub-fields of religions of Asia, religions of the Americas, and religion and nature.	Written exam, MA thesis	Campus
Skills	SLO 2: Students will teach in their particular sub-fields, as well as in the broad field of comparative religions.	SLO 4: Students will TA in their particular sub-fields, as well as in the broad field of comparative religions.	Campus
Professional Behavior	SLO 3: Students will produce research and scholarship that meet the professional standards of the field..	Students will present papers at a public forum or workshop organized by the Religion Department.	Campus

C. Research

All students are assigned a faculty mentor upon admission to the program, based on expressions of faculty interest and the student's intended area of concentration. The mentor answers questions and provide support for the student.

For the MA students in the thesis-variant, they designate their committee chair and supervisory committee. The committee chairs works closely with the student in supervising and guiding his/her research. Each student receives a yearly evaluation letter in addition to S/U grades earned for research courses, and will in addition have the procedure, progress, and expected results of their research reviewed during the course of writing the thesis. The students will also have their research evaluated upon completion of the thesis – to assure that it meets the required standards of the field.

MA students in the non-thesis variant have lesser expectations with regard to conducting research. They are, however, required to do research in connections to papers submitted as part of their courses. In addition, non-thesis students will also take courses related to issues/methods of research.

The department offers a variety of research methods courses each semester including; Theory and Method I & II (in the study of religion), as well as specific courses devoted to research methods and design. The students also take courses in relevant research methods both from within the department and/or from other disciplines within the Social Sciences and Humanities. This provides the students with thorough knowledge in research methods, experimental, survey, content analysis and qualitative methods. In addition, each MA student in the thesis variant will take six credit-hours of thesis research, and has the opportunity to do independent studies. Such independent studies are intended for students who wish to explore topics not covered by the regular courses or to deepen knowledge in a specific subfield of specialization. They entail a rigorous program, which normally includes periodic meetings with the professor, as well as clear assignments that must be completed during the course. In sum, the department's course-offerings and requirements provide students with the knowledge to complete research from conceptualization through publications.

We encourage our MA students and graduates to present research papers at national and international conferences and publish in relevant journals. Most of the courses require the writing/submission of papers, which the students are encouraged to transform into conference papers. In the interest of promoting high-level scholarship among our students, the department has (from 2012) introduced a yearly (toward the end of the Spring semester) competition to select the best conference paper and the best published essay (whether a journal article or a book chapter). Winners in each of these categories will receive a small stipend. The department also provides support for travel to academic conferences.

D. Assessment Timeline

Use this Assessment Timeline template for your plan. Add or delete rows and columns to accommodate your SLOs and assessments.

Program M.A. in Religion

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Assessment	Assessment 1	Assessment 2	Assessment 3
SLOs			
Knowledge			
SLO 1	Written exams	Comprehensive exam (non-thesis)	Thesis defense
Skills			
SLO 2	Annual evaluation		
Professional Behavior			
SLO 3	Presentation/publication of research		

E. Assessment Cycle

Use this Assessment Cycle template for your plan. Add or delete rows as needed to accommodate your SLOs.

Assessment Cycle for:

Program M.A. in Religion College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Analysis and Interpretation: May-June

Program Modifications: Completed by August 31

Dissemination: Completed by September 31

SLOs	Year	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16
Content Knowledge							
Theory and Method					X	X	X
Theory/approaches in relevant track/topic					X	X	X
Skills							
Articulate research					X	X	X
Teaching skills					X	X	X
Professional Behavior							
Production of research					X	X	X

Note: We did not do data collection in previous years. This will begin in the 2013-2014 academic year.

F. Measurement Tools

As a whole, the measurement tools involve a combination of methods. The theory and method (under **knowledge SLO**) are measured through advanced-level courses – by faculty members who teach the courses. Students must here pass exams according to a departmentally approved grading rubric. Competence in classical/contemporary approaches in the department's tracks (religion in the Americas, religion and nature, religions of Asia) (under **knowledge SLO**) is (for non-thesis MA students) assessed by the passing of the Comprehensive exam, consisting of four written exams and an oral exam (measured by pass, conditional pass, or fail). These SLOs are also assessed by the evaluation of the thesis MA students' thesis defense.

The MA students' – in the thesis variant – ability to articulate research (under **skills SLO**) is measured through the thesis supervision and through the final submission and the defense of the thesis, evaluated by the students' thesis committees. This is measured according to the department's criteria stipulated in the Student Handbook. In order to become effective teacher-scholars (under **skills SLO**), we try to create opportunities for MA students to TA for various undergraduate courses. As TAs, the students are closely monitored by faculty members, and each student's performance is measured through a written evaluation done by the supervising faculty member.

The MA students' ability to produce research according to professional standards in the field (under **professional behavior SLO**) is measured through presentation of papers at relevant academic conferences/workshops and through publication in relevant academic journals. The quality of such is measured through the acceptance of the students' papers to conferences and journals, as well as by the faculty who supervise the writing of the papers. Other measurement tools are 'mock-presentations' facilitated by the department, the assessment of abstract (when students apply for travel-funds), and the evaluation of papers for the best conference/publication paper award.

G. Assessment Oversight

Here, list the names and contact information of those who oversee the assessment process in your program. Add or delete rows as needed.

Name	Department Affiliation	Email Address	Phone Number
Terje Ostebo	Graduate Coordinator	ostebo@ufl.edu	352-392-2175
Anne Newman	Senior Secretary	Annen1@ufl.edu	352-392-1625

Figure 1. University of Florida Graduate/Professional Program Assessment Plan Review Rubric

Related resources are found at <http://www.ua.assessment.edu>

Program:		Year:			
Component	Criterion	Rating			Comments
		Met	Partially Met	Not Met	
Mission Statement	Mission statement is articulated clearly.	X			
	The program mission clearly supports the College and University missions, and includes specific statements describing how it supports these missions.	X			
Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) and Assessment Measures	SLOs are stated clearly.	X			
	SLOs focus on demonstration of student learning.	X			
	SLOs are measurable.	X			
	Measurements are appropriate for the SLO.	X			
Research	Research expectations for the program are clear, concise, and appropriate for the discipline.	X			
Assessment Map	The Assessment Map indicates the times in the program where the SLOs are assessed and measured.	X			
	The Assessment Map identifies the assessments used for each SLO.	X			
Assessment Cycle	The assessment cycle is clear.	X			
	All student learning outcomes are measured.	X			
	Data is collected at least once in the cycle.	X			
	The cycle includes a date or time period for data analysis and interpretation.	X			
	The cycle includes a date for planning improvement actions based on the data analysis.	X			
	The cycle includes a date for dissemination of results to the appropriate stakeholders.	X			

University of Florida Graduate/Professional Program Assessment Plan Review Rubric, continued

Component	Criterion	Rating			Comments
		Met	Partially Met	Not Met	
Measurement Tools	Measurement tools are described clearly and concisely.	X			
	Measurements are appropriate for the SLOs.	X			
	Methods and procedures reflect an appropriate balance of direct and indirect methods.	X			
	The report presents examples of at least one measurement tool.	X			
Assessment Oversight	Appropriate personnel (coordinator, committee, etc.) charged with assessment responsibilities are identified	X			