

# Bergen Community College

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## ASSESSMENT REPORT FORM FOR ACADEMIC OPTION

**Assessment Period:** Fall 2014 – Spring 2016

**Department/Program:** Philosophy and Religion: RELIGION OPTION

**Department Chair:** Peter Dlugos

**Department Assessment Liaison:** Toby De Marco

**Date Submitted:** May 31, 2016

**Option Description or mission/goal statement of the Department/Program:**

[Source: internal PHR documents, BCC PHR Department Brochure, BCC PHR web site]

The mission of the BCC Philosophy and Religion faculty is to provide students with a substantial and educationally meaningful program of philosophical and religious studies through well-designed and well-taught on-campus, online, and partially online (hybrid) courses.

Intellectual Skills

An integral feature of our mission – both in Philosophy and in Religious Studies – is to impress upon students the value of critical thought and the value of precision in the use of language and to help them develop the habit of thinking, speaking, and writing with logical rigor and clarity. To that end,

1. we seek to base all philosophy and religion courses on the reading and discussion of the writings of major philosophical and religious thinkers (i.e., on primary sources rather than on textbooks, either in anthology form or in the form of "great books" or "classic texts"), including, in the case of religion, the study of the sacred scriptures of the major religions of the world;

2. we incorporate in all philosophy and religion courses the teaching of basic principles and methods of logical reasoning and/or critical thinking as well as techniques of academic research and writing; and

3. we require students in all philosophy and religion courses to do a substantial amount of expository, analytic, and critical writing in response to the materials studied in the courses.

## Instructional Methods

In carrying out our mission, we utilize instructional methods calculated to meet the educational needs of all students, recognizing that there is a diversity of learning styles among BCC students. We organize the learning process through appropriate combinations of lectures, group discussions, collaborative learning processes and projects, audio-visual presentations (videos, PowerPoint presentations, carefully-designed reading and writing assignments [papers, tests, library research projects, etc.]).

The Bergen Community College Department of Philosophy and Religion provides students with opportunities to study in two related but distinct fields of academic inquiry: (1) philosophy and (2) religious studies.

The Religious Studies option introduces students to the basic problems and methods of theology; to the sacred literatures of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and other religious traditions; and to the history, basic beliefs, and characteristic practices of the major religions of the world.

## Religion Option Goals

1. Students will explain the relationship between religion and culture.
2. Students will apply academic methodologies to the study of religion.
3. Students will analyze sacred texts and traditions recognizing the various hermeneutical approaches.
4. Students will defend positions on religious issues with critical precision, clarity, and rigor, both orally and in writing.

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## **SEMESTER 1: CREATING PROGRAM/OPTION-LEVEL ASSESSMENT PLAN**

**Semester 1 = Fall 2014.**

### **1. Program/Option Learning Goal(s) or Outcome(s) to be assessed (from the above section):**

Religion Option Goal # 2: Students will apply academic methodologies to the study of religion.

### **2. Means of Assessment:**

Thirty-five (35) ungraded (not evaluated) essays/papers will be selected by a random method from approximately eight (8) sections of PHR-120, PHR-121, PHR-124, PHR-127 during the Fall 2015 semester. Each professor will assign an essay that requires an expository essay on the application of a standard academic methodology to the study of religion (Religion Option Goal # 2). The essay assignment/topic sheets will be collected by the assessment liaison, and distributed to the professors participating in the holistic grading/evaluating. Each professor will submit all of the submitted student essays to the assessment liaison by the end of November 2015 and/or by March 2016. The assessment liaison will use

a random method to select a representative sample of thirty-five (35) essays. The representativeness of the sample will be based upon the course, number of sections of the course, and professor. A rubric will be used for the holistic grading. Members of the Philosophy and Religion Department developed the rubric collectively. In April/May of 2016, the thirty-five (35) essays will be evaluated by a group of no less than three professors according to the agreed upon rubric. The rubric will be appended to the assessment report.

- **Feedback from Dean:**

## **SEMESTER 2: DEVELOPING ASSESSMENT TOOL (s) and TIMELINE**

**Semester 2 = Spring 2015.**

### **3A. Describe or attach assessment tool (s), including sources of data, timeline for data collection and how data will be analyzed.**

Sources of data: a representative sample (see above) of thirty-five (35) essays collected from sections of PHR-120, PHR-121, PHR-124, PHR-127 taught by professors during the Fall 2015 and Spring 2016 semesters. (See Appendix C for excerpts of sample essay/assignment questions.)

Professors will assign essays to students in the relevant course sections between September and November of 2015, and/or between January and March 2016. Professors will submit masked essays from relevant courses to the assessment liaison by the end of March 2016. Essays will be selected by a random method to assemble a representative sample.

In April and May 2016, Philosophy and Religion professors will participate in holistic grading using the rubric. Professors will evaluate all essays in the sample according to the Religious Content rubric.

After essays are holistically graded, the assessment liaison will make a data spreadsheet of the raw essay scores (from rubric) for each essay. Averages, medians, population standard deviations, population variances, and modes will be calculated for each essay, and for the entire sample of essays.

Holistic rubric attached as Appendix A.

### **3B. Desired results faculty would like to see.**

The Philosophy and Religion Department desires that seventy-five percent (75 %) of the sample of essays evaluated will be an average of two (2) or above according to the rubric. A score of two is roughly equivalent to a C+/B- grade.

- **Feedback from CIE:**

## **SEMESTER 3: COLLECTING AND ANALYZING DATA**

**Semester 3 = Fall 2015 and Spring 2016.**

### **4. Summary of Results (attach aggregated data table, survey tool, etc., to support the summary)**

Four professors participated in the holistic grading process. Each professor submitted his/her evaluations to the PHR Assessment Liaison. The thirty-five (35) essays were randomly selected to construct a representative sample. The representativeness was determined by the total number of courses from which essays were collected, the total number of course sections from which essays were collected, and the total number of sections and courses taught by a professor from which essays were collected. Please note that the representativeness of the sample did not reflect demographic properties (or other properties) of students. (The purpose of this project did not require such representativeness.)

The Religion Content rubric contained three possible evaluative grades: 3, 2, 1 (see attached rubric: Appendix A). Each of the thirty-five (35) essays was assigned by each professor one rubric grade.

The results were collected, compiled, and analyzed by the PHR Assessment Liaison. For each of the thirty-five essays, arithmetic means, population standard deviations, population variances, medians, and modes were obtained. The same statistical constructions were obtained for the entire data set. (Spreadsheet attached as Appendix B.) The relevant results are as follows.

Arithmetic mean = 2.23

Median of means = 2.25

Mean of population standard deviations = .406

80 % of sample had a mean of  $\geq 2$

Desired result was achieved.

### **5. Recommendations for Improvement:**

Align assignments with student learning outcomes/goals in master syllabi.  
Include some form of library instruction when assignments require research.

- **Feedback from Dean:**

## **SEMESTER 4: CLOSING THE LOOP AND SHARING KNOWLEDGE**

### **6. Use of Results:**

During the Spring 2016 semester the PHR Department had conversations during Department meetings about the results of the Religion Assessment project. Similar to the Philosophy option assessment, one inference we draw from the compiled data and basic statistical analysis is that there is minute variability in evaluative judgments of student work by professors in the PHR Department. The evidence for this claim is that the mean population standard deviation was .406 with a mean population variance of .214. Members of the PHR Department think that this is good and expected. This confirms that what counts as good, quality work in religion courses is stable. Whether one wants to label that evidence for objectivity or inter-subjective agreement in grading/evaluating is beyond the scope of this assessment report. Nonetheless, one may interpret this evaluative stability as providing a substantial reason for the assessment project's reliability and validity with respect to the holistic grading method (of course this does not substantiate any other kind of external validity/reliability).

This assessment project caused the PHR Department to re-evaluate this Religion Option goal (# 2). The PHR Department may rewrite this goal during the Fall 2016 semester. The results emphasized our goal to have professors' assignments (examinations/tests, essays, projects, and presentations) directly connected to a course master syllabus student learning goal, which are, in turn, connected to Religion Option goals. The assessment project reaffirmed our commitment to this practice. In addition, this assessment project caused Religion professors to alter some of their current assignments to be better aligned with student learning goals/outcomes for courses (although this assessment project assessed Religion Option outcomes/goals/objectives.). In addition, Religion professors will include some form of library instruction when assignments require research.

### **▪ Feedback from CIE:**

Appendix A

	<b>** RELIGION CONTENT **</b>	<b>Analysis</b>	<b>Writing</b>
<b>Exemplary</b>	<b>3.</b> The writer has a very clear and accurate understanding of the ideas or arguments being discussed. The problem is clearly stated, and essential details are included and correctly placed.	<b>3.</b> The writer presents and synthesizes textual and other evidence in a way that reveals essential similarities and differences between traditions. The resulting analysis is insightful.	<b>3.</b> The writing is lively, expressive, and engaging. Sentences flow nicely. There are few or no errors in grammar, punctuation, or spelling.
<b>Good</b>	<b>2.</b> The writer has a good understanding of the ideas or arguments being discussed, but there are some factual errors or misconceptions present, or there is too heavy a reliance on secondary source interpretation. Important details may be left out or misplaced.	<b>2.</b> The writer includes and sorts textual and other evidence in a way that reveals some of the important similarities and differences between traditions, but the analysis is not complete, or not fully accurate.	<b>2.</b> The writing is pleasant, acceptable, and mostly mechanically correct, but there may still be typos, spelling errors, or awkward constructions that interfere with reading and/or comprehension.
<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	<b>1.</b> The writer has a very poor or superficial understanding of the ideas or arguments being discussed. Many factual errors or misconceptions are present. Key concepts or details are missing.	<b>1.</b> The writer lists some elements of each tradition, but few or no comparisons or contrasts are made. Little analysis of any sort is done. There may be big gaps that the reader must fill in with guesswork.	<b>1.</b> Sentences are choppy, incomplete, rambling, or awkward, or there may be many spelling typos or errors. Ideas are difficult to comprehend without rereading. Sentences jump from one idea to the next. The essay resists being read aloud.

## Appendix B

2016 phr assess holistic grid religion.xlsx

Rel Content	Essay	Prof 1	Prof 2	Prof 3	Prof 4	AVG	Stdevp	Varp
	1	2	1.5	1	1.5	1.5	0.353553	0.125
	2	3	3	3	3	3	0	0
	3	3	2	1	2	2	0.707107	0.5
	4	3	2	2	2	2.25	0.433013	0.1875
	5	3	2.5	2	2.5	2.5	0.353553	0.125
	6	3	2.5	1	2	2.125	0.73951	0.546875
	7	3	2	2	2	2.25	0.433013	0.1875
	8	2	2	3	2	2.25	0.433013	0.1875
	9	2	2.5	2	2	2.125	0.216506	0.046875
	10	2	2	2	2	2	0	0
	11	3	3	3	3	3	0	0
	12	2	2	1	1.5	1.625	0.414578	0.171875
	13	1	2.5	1	1.5	1.5	0.612372	0.375
	14	2	3	3	2.5	2.625	0.414578	0.171875
	15	3	1.5	1	1.5	1.75	0.75	0.5625
	16	1	2	2	2	1.75	0.433013	0.1875
	17	3	2.5	3	3	2.875	0.216506	0.046875
	18	3	2.5	2	2.5	2.5	0.353553	0.125
	19	2	2.5	3	2.5	2.5	0.353553	0.125
	20	2	2.5	1	2.5	2	0.612372	0.375
	21	2	3	3	3	2.75	0.433013	0.1875
	22	2	3	2	2	2.25	0.433013	0.1875
	23	2	3	2	2	2.25	0.433013	0.1875
	24	2	2	2	2	2	0	0
	25	2	2	2	2	2	0	0
	26	3	3	1	2.5	2.375	0.81968	0.671875
	27	3	2.5	3	3	2.875	0.216506	0.046875
	28	2	2	1	2	1.75	0.433013	0.1875
	29	3	2.5	2	2	2.375	0.414578	0.171875
	30	2	3	2	2.5	2.375	0.414578	0.171875
	31	3	2.5	1	2	2.125	0.73951	0.546875
	32	2	3	1	2	2	0.707107	0.5
	33	3	3	2	2.5	2.625	0.414578	0.171875
	34	3	3	2	2	2.5	0.5	0.25
	35	2	2	1	2	1.75	0.433013	0.1875
<b>AVG</b>						<b>2.232143</b>	<b>0.406326</b>	
<b>Median</b>						<b>2.25</b>		

## Appendix C: Excerpts of Sample Essay/Assignment Questions/Exercises

1. One of the earthly benefits of religion is that it helps believers **understand** why there are problems in life, and also helps them to **cope** with those problems by providing present-day or future-oriented solutions. These explanations can be found in the theoretical expressions (myths and doctrines) of the religion, especially as preserved in Sacred Texts.

### Hinduism

- [Selections from the Upanishads](#)
- [Selections from the Bhagavad Gita](#)
- [Selections from the Laws of Manu](#)

### OR Buddhism

- [Selections from the Early Buddhist Texts \(Tripitaka\)](#)
- [Selections from the Manual of Zen Buddhism](#)

Browse one or more of the Sacred Texts from ONE religion above, then read 3 total pages from them, and gather from those pages information related to the following questions:

- How does this religion explain why there are problems (evil, sin, accidents, injustice, etc) in life?
- How does this religion explain how those problems will be resolved, now or in the future?
- Besides those theoretical tools (beliefs), what other tools (i.e. practices, actions) does the religion provide for the believer to help him or her "cope" with the problems of life?

Then craft a substantial discussion board post (at least 250 words, not including quotations) where you present how this religion helps its believers cope with life's problems. Your post **MUST** refer specifically to the Scriptures you read. **Make sure you note at the end of your post WHICH PAGES from WHICH SCRIPTURE you read.** Ideally, your post will also include connections to what we learned about the religion from the textbook and in class.

I encourage you to go beyond the obvious in your reflection. Note that your job in this writing is not to evaluate or fact check the Scriptures, but to understand and question them. We are not deciding whether the Scriptures are true or false, but examining how they relate to the religion and its answers about life's problems.

2. One of the earthly benefits of religion is that it helps believers **understand** why there are problems in life, and also helps them to **cope** with those problems by providing present-day or

future-oriented solutions. These explanations can be found in the theoretical expressions (myths and doctrines) of the religion, especially as preserved in Sacred Texts.

#### Judaism

- [Selections from the Hebrew Bible \(Tanak\)](#)
- [Selections from the Talmud](#)

#### OR Christianity

- [Selections from the Gospel of John \(from the Christian Bible\)](#)
- [The Imitation of Christ \(a book about living the Christian life\)](#)

#### OR Islam

- [Selections from the Qur'an \(Koran\)](#)
- [A Manual of Hadith](#)

Browse one or both of the Sacred Texts from ONE religion above, then read 3 total pages from them, and gather from those pages information related to the following questions:

- How does this religion explain why there are problems (evil, sin, accidents, injustice, etc) in life?
- How does this religion explain how those problems will be resolved, now or in the future?
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