

RELIGION, THEOLOGY, & CULTURE 1 CORE ASSESSMENT REPORT

OFFICE OF ASSESSMENT

SEPTEMBER 1, 2017

Introduction

The Core student learning objectives identify the educational priorities for all undergraduates in Santa Clara University's Core Curriculum. Assessment of student learning is ongoing in the Core—we seek to understand in what areas of the learning objectives students are challenged or excel, and how the Core can offer better support for faculty teaching in these areas.

This assessment report summarizes the process and findings from an assessment of the two learning objectives for the Religion, Theology, & Culture 1 (RTC 1) Core requirement. When the 2009 Core was approved, RTC 1 was described in the following way:

“The Core curriculum's RTC series is integral to the University's Catholic identity, promoting a critical engagement between faith and cultures and exemplifying a commitment to academic excellence and freedom. In each stage of this series, students will have the opportunity to explore, question, and clarify the role of religion in understanding faith, in forming personal and communal identities, and in engaging the critical issues of the contemporary world.

The first course in RTC aims to enhance critical reflection on religious belief and practice. It introduces students to the basic approaches by which scholars seek to understand what religion reveals about human beings — their societies, traditions, convictions, and aspirations. It provides an opportunity for students to enrich their understanding of their own religious lives and to better comprehend the diverse local and global communities of which they are a part.”

RTC 1 includes with the following Core learning goals:

- **Global Cultures:** The intertwined development of global ideas, institutions, religions, and cultures, including Western cultures.
- **Critical Thinking:** The ability to identify, reflect upon, evaluate, integrate, and apply different types of information and knowledge to form independent judgments.
- **Complexity:** An approach to understanding the world that appreciates ambiguity and nuance as well as clarity and precision.
- **Religious Reflection:** Questioning and clarifying beliefs through critical inquiry into faith and the religious dimensions of human existence.

The Assessment Process

In winter quarter of 2016-17, the Office of Assessment asked faculty teaching RTC 1 classes in the core curriculum to participate in the assessment of the two RTC 1 learning objectives.

1.1

Students will describe and compare the central religious ideas and practices from at least two locally or globally distinct cultures or communities.

1.2

Students will use critical approaches to reflect on their own beliefs and the religious dimensions of human existence.

Student work was collected from a random sample of students from 12% of the 386 students enrolled in RTC 1 courses. Faculty teaching the courses identified the assignments or exam questions providing the clearest evidence for student learning with respect to the two learning objectives. The Office of Assessment received student work from 46 students from 11 of the 16 classes offered. Student and faculty identifiers were redacted to prepare it for scoring by a team of faculty members teaching in the area.

Five faculty and one staff member participated in the assessment of the work. They first attended one of two norming sessions in the Spring quarter of 2017 to become familiar with the rubric (see Appendix) used to score student work. Student learning for each objective was scored on a four-point proficiency scale.

After the norming sessions were completed, the remaining student work was distributed among the raters to be scored. About 63% of the work was scored by two raters in order to examine whether the rubric was applied consistently across raters. Inter-rater reliability (IRR) was calculated using the software program AgreeStat® for the two learning objectives. The agreement coefficient Gwet’s AC2 was interpreted, using simple ordinal weights and Landis-Koch benchmarks (see Table 1). Overall, the faculty raters were quite consistent with one another in their scoring and their use of the rubric. In the small number of cases in which scorers varied by more than two points, a third rater was called in to reconcile.

Table 1. Agreement Coefficients

Learning Objective	Gwet’s AC2	Benchmark
LO 1.1	0.65	Moderate
LO 1.2	0.72	Moderate

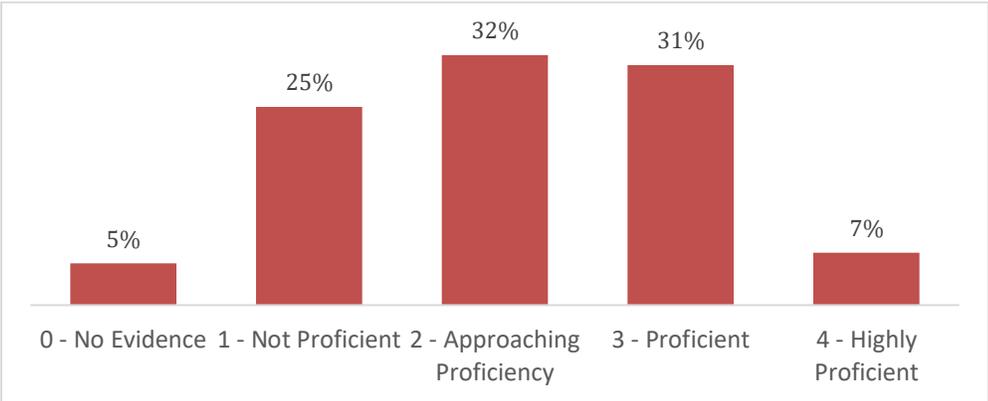
What We Learned

The scores given for work for each learning objective were tabulated and converted into percentages.

LO 1.1 Students will describe and compare the central religious ideas and practices from at least two locally or globally distinct cultures or communities.

Thirty-eight percent of the student work was judged as proficient or highly proficient for learning objective 3.1 (see Figure 1). Another 32% of student work was rated as approaching proficiency and 25% was judged as not proficient. Five percent was scored as having “no evidence,” indicating that the student work did not appear to address the learning objective at all.

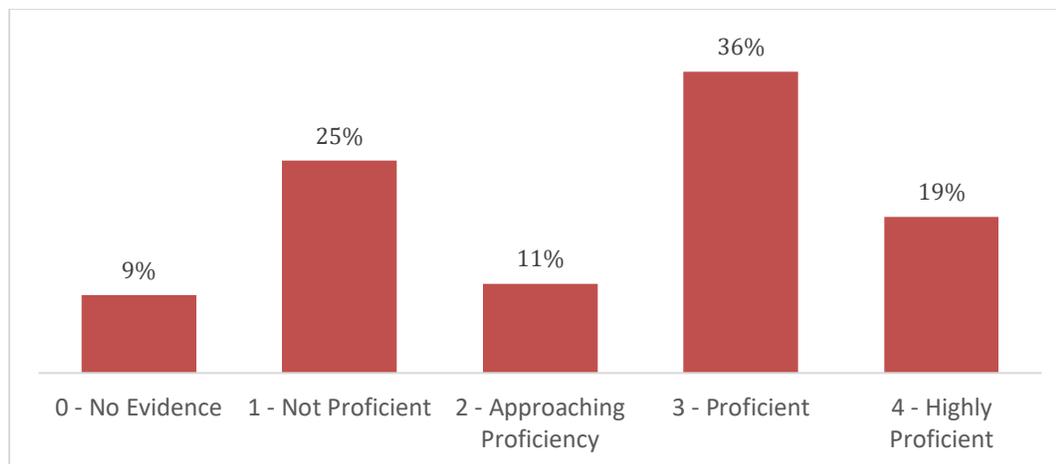
Figure 1. Percent of Rubric Scores for Learning Objective 1.1



LO 1.2 Students will use critical approaches to reflect on their own beliefs and the religious dimensions of human existence.

Proficiency was scored higher for LO 1.2 with 55% of the student work receiving a score of 3 or 4 (See Figure 2). An additional 11% of the work was scored as approaching proficiency. Twenty-five percent of the work was scored as not proficient and another 9% was scored as showing no evidence of LO 1.2.

Figure 2. Percent of Rubric Scores for Learning Objective 1.2



Differences across students

Scores were also examined by group differences to see if there were statistically significant differences by student gender and student race and ethnicity. No statistically significant differences for either gender or race/ethnicity were found.

Conclusions

Overall, the assessment points to the need for discussion among faculty teaching in this area. Only 38% of the student work reached the target level of proficiency for LO 1.1 (*Students will describe and compare the central religious ideas and practices from at least two locally or globally distinct cultures or communities*), although it should be noted that an additional 32% was scored as approaching proficiency according to the rubric. This learning objective asks students to “describe and compare,” tasks that are not overly complex, but most students are taking this course in their first year at SCU. Are faculty satisfied with this level of proficiency?

According to the rubric, student work earning a “2” (approaching proficiency) on LO 1.1 met the criteria of: “Ideas and/or practices are stated but description leaves some terms undefined, ambiguous, or unclear. Comparison is not as meaningful or complete due to missing details on one or more locally or globally distinct culture/community, or because little effort is made to provide a clear comparison.” Another 25% of the work earned a “1” (not proficient,” indicating that “Ideas and/or practices are stated without sufficient clarification, description or accuracy. The comparison is superficial or notably incomplete, or may not be directly made. The response does include two or more locally or globally distinct cultures or communities, but part or all are seriously underdeveloped.”

The team of faculty scoring the work noted that in some coursework, students were not addressing religious ideas or practices from at least *two* locally or globally distinct cultures or communities. If only one culture were addressed, the work was scored as not proficient (1). If it lacked a comparison, it earned a 2. Both of these were common in the student work. Additionally, there was some question about what constitutes a “central religious idea or practice,” with faculty scorers finding that students were not addressing central ideas or practices.

Although rubric scores were higher for LO 1.2 (*Students will use critical approaches to reflect on their own beliefs and the religious dimensions of human existence*), 36% was scored as not proficient or approaching proficiency, and 9% as showing no evidence of student learning.

Scorers noted that much of the work did not show a direct reflection of students’ own beliefs. Scoring was adjusted so that work was scored the same “*regardless of whether beliefs are clear from the student’s worldview or their analysis of others’ beliefs.*” Even with this adjustment, 25% of the scores were not proficient. Faculty scorers observed that student work often lacked a critical approach for which to reflect upon their own and others’ beliefs.

These findings suggest a need for faculty to reach greater consensus on the learning objectives and how to incorporate these into student assignments. RTC 1 is designated to help meet the core global learning goals, and from this assessment, it appears that students are not having the opportunity to address this or to demonstrate their understandings. Additionally, there is a need to clarify the way in which we expect students to express the goal of religious reflection.

The Core and the Office of Assessment will host a faculty conversation in the fall so that faculty may review and discuss these findings, and identify ways to achieve the outcomes they seek for student learning.

Acknowledgments: The Office of Assessment thanks the RTC 1 FCC, the faculty teaching Core courses who participated in the assessment, the faculty members who participated as scorers for the student work, and our student assistants who contribute to the many phases of the assessment process.

Appendix: Scoring Rubric for RTC 1 Assessment of Student Learning (2016-17)

Objective	Highly proficient -4	Proficient -3	Approaching proficiency- 2	Not proficient - 1
<p>RTC 1.1 Describe and compare the central religious ideas and practices from at least two locally or globally distinct cultures or communities.</p>	<p>Ideas and/or practices are clearly and comprehensively described. Response delivers a developed and insightful comparison of similarities or differences between ideas and/or practices from at least two locally or globally distinct cultures or communities.</p>	<p>Ideas and/or practices are clearly described. Response provides a generally accurate and sufficient comparison of religious ideas and/or practices from at least two locally or globally distinct cultures or communities, and is not seriously impeded by omissions.</p>	<p>Ideas and/or practices are stated but description leaves some terms undefined, ambiguous, or unclear. Comparison is not as meaningful or complete due to missing details on one or more locally or globally distinct culture/community, or because little effort is made to provide a clear comparison.</p>	<p>Ideas and/or practices are stated without sufficient clarification, description or accuracy. The comparison is superficial or notably incomplete, or may not be directly made. The response does include two or more locally or globally distinct cultures or communities, but part or all are seriously underdeveloped.</p>
<p>RTC 1.2 Use critical approaches to reflect on their own beliefs and the religious dimensions of human existence.</p> <p><i>Note to scorers: Score the same regardless of whether beliefs are clear from the student's worldview or their analysis of others' beliefs. However, please make a note anytime you see the student's own worldview clearly expressed.</i></p>	<p>Provides an in-depth reflection of religious beliefs and/or personal worldview utilizing relevant theories, concepts, and/or methods. Viewpoints and interpretations are insightful and well supported. Clear, detailed examples are provided.</p>	<p>Provides a reasonably developed reflection of religious beliefs and/or personal worldview utilizing relevant theories, concepts and/or methods. Viewpoints and interpretations are supported. Appropriate examples are provided.</p>	<p>Provides a minimal reflection of religious beliefs and/or personal worldview with limited utilization of relevant theories, concepts and/or methods. Viewpoints and interpretations are unsupported or supported with flawed arguments. Examples are limited or are irrelevant to the assignment.</p>	<p>Provides a superficial reflection of religious beliefs and/or personal worldview with no clear utilization theories, concepts and/or methods. Viewpoints and interpretations are missing, inappropriate, and/or unsupported. Examples are not provided.</p>