

# RELIGION, THEOLOGY, & CULTURE 3 CORE ASSESSMENT REPORT

OFFICE OF ASSESSMENT

JULY, 2019

## 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 ways in which we can enhance student learning and better support faculty teaching in these areas.

This assessment report summarizes the process and findings from an assessment of the two learning objectives for the Religion, Theory, & Culture 3 (RTC 3) Core requirement. When the 2009 Core was approved, RTC 3 was described in the following way:

Building upon the first two courses, the third course in RTC applies insights from the study of religion to difficult, open-ended questions of vital interest to contemporary societies. From historical or current perspectives, this course takes critical engagement to a creative level either in theory or in practice.

RTC 3 includes the following Core learning goals:

- **Ethical Reasoning:** Drawing on ethical traditions to assess the consequences of individual and institutional decisions
- **Critical Thinking:** The ability to identify, reflect upon, evaluate, integrate, and apply different types of information and knowledge to form independent judgments.
- **Perspective:** Seeking out the experience of different cultures and people, striving to view the world through their eyes
- **Religious Reflection:** Questioning and clarifying beliefs through critical inquiry into faith and the religious dimensions of human existence.

## The Assessment Process

In Spring quarter of 2017, the Office of Assessment asked faculty teaching RTC3 classes in the core curriculum to participate in the assessment of the two RTC 3 learning objectives.

3.1

Students will identify diverse perspectives and evaluate ethical positions on contemporary questions

3.2

Students will evaluate and apply insights from the study of religion to open-ended questions facing contemporary society

Student work was collected from a random sample of students from 16% of the 507 students enrolled in RTC 3 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 for 85 students from 16 of the 20 classes offered. Student and faculty identifiers were redacted to prepare the work for scoring.

Five faculty and one staff member participated in the assessment of the work, first attending one of two norming sessions in the Fall quarter of 2017 to become familiar with the rubric used to score student work (see Appendix). 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 64% 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). In the small number of cases in which scorers varied by more than two points, a third rater was called in to reconcile. In the final calculation of data, the tie-breaking scores replaced the outliers.

Table 1. Agreement Coefficients

Learning Objective	Gwet’s AC2	Benchmark
LO 3.1	0.59	Fair
LO 3.2	0.57	Fair

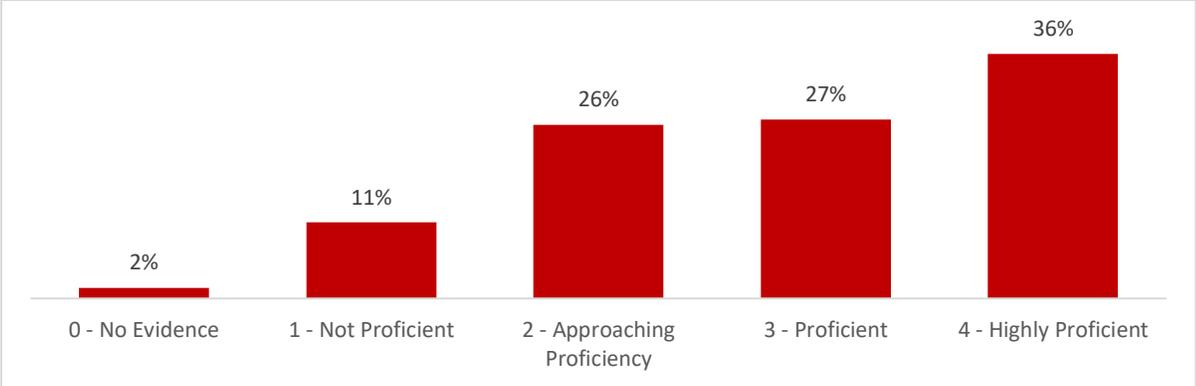
All rubric scores associated with each learning objective were tabulated and converted into percentages.

**What We Learned**

***LO 3.1 Students will identify diverse perspectives and evaluate ethical positions on contemporary questions.***

Sixty-three percent of the student work was judged as “proficient” or “highly proficient” for learning objective 3.1 (see Figure 1). Another 26% of student work was rated as “approaching proficiency “and 11% was judged as not proficient. Two percent was scored as having “no evidence,” indicating that the student work did not appear to address the learning objective at all.

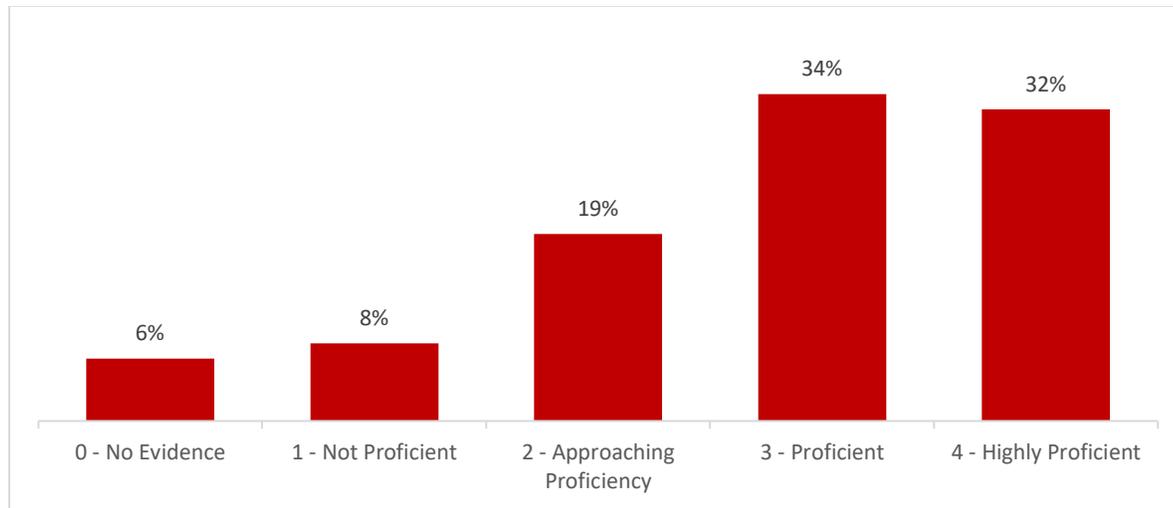
Figure 1. Percent of Rubric Scores for Learning Objective 3.1



**LO 3.2 Students will evaluate and apply insights from the study of religion to open-ended questions facing contemporary society.**

Sixty-six percent of the student work was judged as proficient or highly proficient for learning objective 3.2 (see Figure 2). An additional 19% of student work was rated as approaching proficiency and 8% was judged as not proficient. Six percent was scored as having “no evidence,” indicating that the student work did not appear to address the learning objective.

Figure 2. Percent of Rubric Scores for Learning Objective 3.2



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**

Generally, the results show that close to two-thirds of the student work sampled is meeting or exceeding expectations for the two learning objectives. However, it is important to ask how might we achieve a greater proportion of students producing work that meets the rubric qualities of proficiency or above in this core area in which students typically are juniors or seniors, and should be capable of reaching the level of achievement sought.

In discussion during the norming sessions and through feedback after the scoring was complete, the faculty who rated student work had some relevant observations what led some of the work to fall short of meeting the rubric standards. The scorers surmised that some assignments may not have asked students to give religious and ethical perspectives equal attention in assignments addressing LO 3.1, or whether the ethical analysis should be grounded in *religious* perspectives. With LO 3.1, the question can be raised about whether faculty teaching in the area interpret the meaning of “diverse perspectives” in the same way. The guidelines developed to assist faculty in developing courses to meet this requirement date back to 2009 (when the Core was just being implemented). They do not provide much additional detail on how diverse perspectives should be interpreted, nor on the evaluation of “ethical positions.”

Faculty might find it helpful to review their assignments to ensure that the assignment prompts do indeed ask for work that reflects the level of the cognitive tasks embedded in LO 3.1 and 3.2 (evaluate, apply). The proportion of work that was scored “0” (no evidence that student addressed LO) or “1” not proficient is an indicator that some assignments may not have clearly signaled to students that they were to engage in that type of critical analysis or that they should include multiple perspectives, not just one. Some of the raters noted that they found some of the student’s work to be too general or that because students had engaged only one source, the depth of analysis was inherently limited.

### **Recommendations**

All three assessments of the RTC requirements have noted that a discussion among faculty teaching in the area is an important next step in order to 1) review and clarify the learning objectives and 2) share assignment and teaching approaches that are effective in helping students achieve all of the RTC learning objectives. It would be beneficial to discuss all three RTC assessments together in order to take a more holistic view of the requirement. Following that, updating the guidelines for faculty teaching in this area (or developing new courses) will provide an important resource for faculty teaching RTC courses.

**Acknowledgments:** The Office of Assessment thanks the RTC 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 assistant who helped manage communications and other aspects of assessment process.

Appendix: Scoring Rubric for RTC 3 Assessment of Student Learning (2017)

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Highly proficient (4)</b>	<b>Proficient (3)</b>	<b>Approaching proficiency (2)</b>	<b>Not proficient (1)</b>
<b>RTC 3.1</b> Identify diverse perspectives and evaluate ethical positions on contemporary questions	Diverse perspectives representing the experiences of different cultures and people are/or stated clearly and described comprehensively. Response includes thoughtful analysis of the assumptions and implications of different ethical perspectives/positions related to reasoning about contemporary questions.	Diverse perspectives representing the experiences of different cultures and/or people are stated, described, and clarified so that understanding is not seriously impeded by omissions. Response includes basic analysis of assumptions and implications of different ethical perspectives related to reasoning about contemporary questions.	Diverse perspectives representing the experiences of different cultures and/or people are stated, but description leaves some elements undefined, ambiguous, or underdeveloped. Response offers some description of the assumptions and implications of different ethical perspectives related to reasoning about contemporary questions.	Diverse perspectives representing the experiences of different cultures and/or people are named, but there is limited description or clarification of diverse perspectives, and/or they may have inaccuracies. Response identifies basic and obvious ethical issues related to reasoning about contemporary questions.
<b>RTC 3.2</b> Evaluate and apply insights from the study of religion to open-ended questions facing contemporary society	Provides an in-depth analysis of the way in which religion can inform our understanding of questions or problems facing society and potential solutions, grounded in a comprehensive analysis of relevant theories, concepts, and/or strategies. Viewpoints and interpretations are insightful and well supported.	Provides a reasonably developed analysis of the way in which religion can inform our understanding of questions or problems facing society and potential solutions, grounded in relevant theories, concepts and/or strategies. Viewpoints and interpretations are supported.	Provides a limited analysis of the way in which religion can inform our understanding of questions or problems facing society and potential solutions, with some reference to theories, concepts and/or strategies. Viewpoints and interpretations are unsupported or supported with weak or flawed arguments.	Provides a very superficial analysis of the way in which religion can inform our understanding of questions or problems facing society and potential solutions, with very limited or no clear reference to theories, concepts and/or strategies. Viewpoints and interpretations are missing, inappropriate, and/or unsupported.