

Department: Theology

Academic Year: 2013-2014

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I. Background

In the past few academic years, the department identified one general education course in its assessment plan for both general education and departmental review. In the past, the department focused on faith in its general education assessment and information literacy in its departmental assessment. Having felt that the general education course had proved to supply the department with sufficient feedback, the department chose to focus its attention in another direction beginning in 2012-2013. During the 2012-2013 academic year, the department selected as its assessment task to review a course specifically within the theology major and also linked to the Lutheran Teacher Diploma (LTD). Because of the important information gleaned from this assessment review the department chose to continue its assessment review within the theology major and linked to the Lutheran Teacher Diploma (LTD) for 2013-2014 academic year.

II. Question

Based on the department's mission statement, goals, and outcomes, the following learning outcome provides the basis for this academic year's assessment: Students will demonstrate skills of biblical and theological inquiry and analysis relevant to their profession and/or graduate-study career goals.

III. Methodology

A random sample of the writing project ("Formulation of Biblical Doctrine") from Theology 361 was gathered from Spring Semester 2014. The attached document shows the various aspects scored for each sample. Scores were collected for each statement based on a Likert scale of 1-5 (1 = fails to meet the outcome; 3 = meets the outcome; and 5 = exceeds the outcome). The scores were averaged for each statement, and the results are listed in the next section.

IV. Summary of results

- a. The student appropriately incorporates and applies Old and New Testament Bible passages in the paper.
 - i. 2013-2014: 3.3
 - ii. 2012-2013: 3.7
 - iii. The department continues to meet this outcome with the understanding that the role of Holy Scripture being the formal principle for all doctrine and practice. Having students complete this assignment gives them the understanding and ability to make connections between Scripture and doctrinal beliefs. Also, this assignment provides the opportunity for

students to search, read, and reflect upon the Old and New Testaments within the framework of Church doctrine.

- b. The student appropriately articulates an understanding of Lutheran Christian doctrine in the paper.
 - i. 2013-2014: 3.9
 - ii. 2012-2013: 3.9
 - iii. The department continues to meet this outcome, challenging students to put into their own words basic definitions of doctrinal terms within the Lutheran Christian understanding of doctrinal teachings.

- c. The student appropriately articulates the Lutheran understanding of Law and Gospel in the paper.
 - i. 2013-2014: 3.5
 - ii. 2012-2013: 3.7
 - iii. The department continues to meet the outcome of this standard, while also aware that this standard continues to be lifted up as a key hermeneutical principle. The mingling of Law and Gospel “hides the merit of Christ and robs troubled consciences of their comfort.” (Walther). Likewise, the department understands the need to identify contemporary issues within the Law and Gospel framework so that the Gospel may be applied to individual situations just as medicine is applied to a wound.

- d. The student appropriately incorporates the department’s standards regarding appearance, clarity, and formality of style.
 - i. 2013-2014: 4.1
 - ii. 2012-2013: 3.4
 - iii. The department continues to meet the outcome of this standard, and even increasing its measurement from last year’s departmental assessment of the same assignment. The department made a collective effort to standardize basic writing components and expectations across the religion and theology courses. Part of the reason why this scoring has increased may be due to the fact that the department consistently emphasizes what is acceptable writing practices at the 100- and 200-level courses so that when students take courses in the 300-level courses, students are aware of writing expectations for this assignment.

V. Conclusions

- a. The assignment has proven to be an excellent instrument to analyze students’ ability to articulate doctrinal understanding within a Biblical context. The assessment of the assignment does indicate that the department is dealing with the Biblical text in Theo 361. There is integration of Biblical material and doctrinal understanding within Theo 361.

- b. The department is not sure if the assignment lends itself to analyzing students' ability to distinguish between Law and Gospel. Of the four standards, the assignment may not be a good match in terms of analyzing the standard of Law and Gospel articulation and distinction.
- c. Having utilized this assignment for departmental assessment the past two years, it is clear to the department that an Interpretation course (Theo 241, 242, 251, 252) is a necessary prerequisite for Theo 361. Areas of study such as hermeneutical approaches, distinction between Law and Gospel, and basic Biblical exegetical skills prepare students for the task of going further in their Biblical and doctrinal study in Theo 361.

VI. Action Plan

- a. Having utilized this assignment for two academic years and being satisfied with the assessment process, the department believes it is time to move on to another departmental learning outcome. For the 2014-15 academic year, the department is considering the general education goal of faith. The following describes the aspects of faith within general education: "to recognize that we are created by God, condemned by sin, redeemed by Christ, living out faith in our vocations." Aspects of faith are further clarified: "articulating the Lutheran understanding of the human condition in light of God's Law and Gospel; articulating an understanding of Christian vocation that includes many professions and life roles; and responding to God's love through service to neighbor." The department believes that the course that best captures the faith goal is Theo 210-Faith and Life.
- b. In August 2014, the department will gather to affirm the general education faith goal and the course to be utilized in this assessment. Also, the department will set the criteria for assessment and identify the assignment that will be the basis for the assessment. Following the August 2014 meeting, the department will determine the remainder of the departmental assessment tasks and dates for them to be completed.