

Program-Level Assessment: Annual Report

Program: Ph.D. in Theological Studies

Department: Theological Studies

Degree or Certificate Level: Ph.D.

College/School: CAS

Date (Month/Year): September 2023

Primary Assessment Contact: Elizabeth Block

In what year was the data upon which this report is based collected? 2021-2023

In what year was the program's assessment plan most recently reviewed/updated? 2018

1. Student Learning Outcomes

Which of the program's student learning outcomes were assessed in this annual assessment cycle?

SLO #6: Graduate students will conduct independent research resulting in an original contribution to knowledge in their area of concentration.

2. Assessment Methods: Artifacts of Student Learning

Which artifacts of student learning were used to determine if students achieved the outcome(s)? Please identify the course(s) in which these artifacts were collected. Clarify if any such courses were offered a) online, b) at the Madrid campus, or c) at any other off-campus location.

The artifacts used to determine if students achieved the outcome are the Ph.D. prospectus, dissertation, and oral defense, each evaluated by departmental rubric. The rubrics are attached in Appendix A. Additionally, information about publications by graduates of our Ph.D. program, where available, were used to evaluate this SLO.

In the third year of the program, students write and defend their dissertation prospectus before a committee of five persons: the dissertation director, two dissertation readers, a fourth member selected to serve only on the prospectus committee, and the Coordinator of Graduate Studies. This is considered to be the "oral exam," the successful passing of which moves a student to Ph.D. candidate status. During this two-hour oral exam, students offer a 15-minute summary of the argument of and plan for their dissertation and how they will execute it. Each faculty member then has 15-20 minutes to ask questions of the student and engage in a discussion of the proposed project.

Following the successful completion of the prospectus and prospectus defense, the Ph.D. candidate writes the dissertation. The successful dissertation itself and the dissertation defense, evaluated by the dissertation director and dissertation committee members using the department's rubric, indicate that the student has communicated scholarly arguments effectively both orally and in writing.

3. Assessment Methods: Evaluation Process

What process was used to evaluate the artifacts of student learning, and by whom? Please identify the tools(s) (e.g., a rubric) used in the process and include them in/with this report.

Rubrics used to assess the Ph.D. prospectus, the dissertation, and the dissertation oral defense were used by Elizabeth Block, Coordinator of Graduate Studies, to evaluate the artifacts and are attached to this report in the Appendix A.

4. Data/Results

What were the results of the assessment of the learning outcome(s)? Please be specific. Does achievement differ by teaching modality (e.g., online vs. face-to-face) or on-ground location (e.g., STL campus, Madrid campus, other off-campus site)?

The results showed that this learning outcome has been achieved by doctoral students. In the past 3 years (2021-2023), 8 doctoral students have written a prospectus and passed the oral defense of the prospectus, indicating their readiness to move forward with original research culminating in a dissertation. In the past 3 years (2021-2023), 8 students also successfully defended their dissertations and graduated from our Ph.D. program (see list in Appendix B). Additional indicators of success in producing original research include the publications of two graduates of our Ph.D. program, who both have monographs forthcoming with Brill Press.

5. Findings: Interpretations & Conclusions

What have you learned from these results? What does the data tell you?

The data tells us that students who are able to write a successful prospectus are also able to write a dissertation, defend the dissertation, and graduate from our program. The data also indicates that our students are doing this well. There are rarely students who are unable to make it to or through the prospectus stage of the program. In 2023, one Ph.D. student opted to earn an MTS degree instead of pursuing the Ph.D. Also in 2023, a Ph.D. student who had received numerous extensions and faced many personal challenges opted to leave the program before completing the prospectus.

6. Closing the Loop: Dissemination and Use of Current Assessment Findings

A. When and how did your program faculty share and discuss these results and findings from this cycle of assessment?

This information has been shared with the graduate studies committee in the department of theological studies. Primarily, our concern now is to revise our SLOs in order to better capture the goals of the Ph.D. program and to make assessment more streamlined.

B. How specifically have you decided to use these findings to improve teaching and learning in your program? For example, perhaps you've initiated one or more of the following:

Changes to the Curriculum or Pedagogies

- Course content
- Teaching techniques
- Improvements in technology
- Prerequisites

- Course sequence
- New courses
- Deletion of courses
- Changes in frequency or scheduling of course offerings

Changes to the Assessment Plan

- Student learning outcomes
- Artifacts of student learning
- Evaluation process

- Evaluation tools (e.g., rubrics)
- Data collection methods
- Frequency of data collection

Please describe the actions you are taking as a result of these findings.

The graduate studies committee will be meeting this semester to revisit and revise our SLOs. There may not be time this year to revise our evaluation tools (rubrics), but this needs our attention also. Additionally, the

Coordinator of Graduate Studies needs more information from graduates about their publications and careers, as this is a very helpful assessment of the success of our program and the achievement of these outcomes.

If no changes are being made, please explain why.

7. Closing the Loop: Review of Previous Assessment Findings and Changes

A. What is at least one change your program has implemented in recent years as a result of assessment data?

We have adjusted the professional development series in our department to be more appropriate for Ph.D. students in the first two years of the program, focusing on navigating graduate seminars, academic writing, and turning seminar papers into conference papers/publications. The frequency and intensity of this program was becoming too much for graduate students.

B. How has this change/have these changes been assessed?

It is too soon to assess this change, as we just implemented it in Fall 2023.

C. What were the findings of the assessment?

N/A

D. How do you plan to (continue to) use this information moving forward?

The Coordinator of Graduate Studies will continue to evaluate the Brown Bag professional development series.

IMPORTANT: Please submit any assessment tools and/or revised/updated assessment plans along with this report.

J: Prospectus Oral Defense Rubric

Student: _____

Committee Chair: _____

First Reader: _____

Second Reader: _____

Learning Goals

- Students will demonstrate the ability to defend, clarify, and expand upon arguments made in the written prospectus.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to articulate their understanding of the significance of the proposed dissertation to the broader field.

I. Instructions

- Listen to the oral defense.
- Using the rubric key, evaluate the defense and provide a total score.

Rubric Key

5 = Outstanding

4 = Very Good

3 = Acceptable

2 = Needs Work

II. Rubric Indicator

1 =	
Defends, clarifies, and expands upon written prospectus with further evidence and argument	
Directly and correctly answers the examiner's questions	
Demonstrates knowledge of proposed dissertation subject, primary sources, and background scholarship	
Demonstrates ability to argue for significance of proposed dissertation topic to the broader field	
Shows awareness of the limits of his or her knowledge	
Demonstrates an understanding of the nature of the discipline	
Total Score	

III. Evaluation Score (Please List Number Score) _____

IV. Evaluation Possibilities for the Defense

- Pass with distinction (a score of 27 or above)
- Pass (a score of 18 or above)
- Fail (a score of 17 or below, with option for one retake)

Faculty Name

Faculty Signature

K: Dissertation Rubric

Student: _____

Committee Chair: _____

First Reader: _____

Second Reader: _____

Learning Goals

- Students will present an original thesis in response to a question of significance to their fields.
- Students will craft a dissertation of substantial length that logically and persuasively argues in defense of the thesis.
- Students will demonstrate a critical grasp of major issues and themes in their fields and of relevance to the particular question that drives the thesis.
- Students will make an original contribution to their fields.

I. Instructions

- Read dissertation.
- Using the rubric key, evaluate the dissertation and provide a total score.

II. Rubric Indicator

Rubric Key

- 5 = Outstanding
- 4 = Very Good
- 3 = Acceptable
- 2 = Needs Work
- 1 = Unacceptable

A. Foundational Elements	
Statement of the Question <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulates a question that has not yet been answered or has been answered inadequately • Articulates a question that can be answered • Articulates a question that deserves a dissertation-length response 	
Thesis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directly answers the question • Clear and concise • Advances the field • Orients and drives the structure of the dissertation 	
State of the Question/Literature Review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviews literature in English and other languages • Identifies schools, trends, patterns, or other relationships in the existing scholarship • Recognizes relative significance of various scholarly contributions 	

<p>Primary Sources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies diverse types of sources (if applicable) • Demonstrates use of sources in their original language • Places logical and coherent limit on sources • Demonstrates knowledge and use of unpublished sources (if applicable) • Critically assesses published primary sources 	
<p>Method</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulates coherent method that fits the sources and thesis • Situates method in the context of existing scholarship 	
B. Formal Elements	
<p>Style</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employs clear, correct English grammar and syntax • Employs accurate vocabulary and technical terminology appropriate to the question • Effectively transitions from section to section, chapter to chapter, etc. 	
<p>Organization and Argumentation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outlines the structure of the argument proposed in defense of the thesis • Adheres to the outline given • Presents appropriate and persuasive evidence in defense of the thesis • Constructs a logical argument in defense of the thesis on the basis of evidence presented • Demonstrates significance of thesis to the field 	
C. Functional Elements	
<p>Formatting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employs footnotes formatted in Chicago Style and according to the conventions of the discipline • Includes footnotes containing original text from foreign-language sources that have been translated into English in the body of the dissertation • Includes appendices (if applicable) presenting relevant documentary materials, datasets, etc. 	
<p>Bibliography</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follows Chicago Style and the conventions of the discipline for bibliographic citations • Separates primary and secondary sources into discrete sections • Includes all sources cited in notes and appendices, as well as other works consulted • Arranges citations in alphabetical order 	
Total Score	

III. Evaluation Score (Please List Number Score) _____

IV. Evaluation Possibilities for the Dissertation

- Pass with Distinction (a score of 40 or above)
- Pass (a score of 27 or above)
- Fail (a score of 26 or below, with option for one retake)

Faculty Name

Faculty Signature

L: Dissertation Oral Defense Rubric

Student: _____

Committee Chair: _____

First Reader: _____

Second Reader: _____

Learning Goals

- Students will demonstrate the ability to defend, clarify, and expand upon arguments made in the written dissertation.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to articulate the significance of their dissertation to the broader field.

I. Instructions

- Listen to the oral defense.
- Using the rubric key, evaluate the defense and provide a total score.

Rubric Key

5 = Outstanding

4 = Very Good

3 = Acceptable

2 = Needs Work

II. Rubric Indicator

1 =	
Defends, clarifies, and expands upon written dissertation with further evidence and argument	
Directly and correctly answers the examiner's questions	
Demonstrates knowledge of dissertation subject, primary sources, and background scholarship	
Demonstrates ability to synthesize dissertation topic with broader topics in the discipline of theology	
Shows awareness of the limits of his or her knowledge	
Demonstrates an understanding of the significance of the dissertation to the broader field	
Total Score	

III. Evaluation Score (Please List Number Score) _____

IV. Evaluation Possibilities for the Defense

- Pass with distinction (a score of 27 or above)
- Pass (a score of 18 or above)
- Fail (a score of 17 or below, with option for one retake)

Faculty Name

Faculty Signature

**Ph.D. Program Graduates and Dissertation Titles
Defended 2021-2023**

2023

David Justice, "King and Kingdom Violence: Thinking with Martin Luther King, Jr. Toward the Beloved Community"

Chelsea Trotter, "The Devil Beyond the Bible"

Stephen "Craig" Sanders, "Wholly Resting in a Holy God: A Theological Interpretation of Eschatological Rest from the Seventh Day to the Lord's Day"

Tracy Russell, "The Betrothed of Christ: A Study of the Nuptial Metaphor in Late Ancient Syriac Virgin Martyr Narratives"

2022

Laura Estes, "Late Antique Christian Portrayals of Muslims and Jews"

2021

Isaac Arten, "'To Remove Want and Tame this Ferocious Spirit': Property and Possession in Nineteenth-Century British Protestant Missionaries' Theological Anthropology"

Alec Arnold, "The Technologization of Sexual Desire and the Future of Ecstatic Embodiment: A Catholic Response to Transhumanist Sexuality"

Stephen Lawson, "Overcoming the Abyss: Erik Peterson's Eschatological Ecclesiology against Historicism and Anti-Historical Theology"

**Ph.D. Prospectuses Defended
2021-2023**

2023

Michael Greve, "The Theory and Practice of Church Councils: A Retrieval of Robert Bellarmine and His Anglican Critics"

Andrew Tucker, "Isaac of Antioch's Memre on Faith"

2022

Clayton Killion, "Tangled Traditions: The Long and Short of Early Christian Hair-Thought"

Ethan Laster, "The Material Formation of Mystical Sensibilities in Late Antique East Syriac Christianity"

Joshua Sturgeon, "After Deconstruction: A Post-Evangelical Process Theology"

2021

Tony Crescio, no title given, but topic is St. Augustine, Virtue, and Liturgy

Joseph Grone, "Becoming Bread: The Liturgical Constitution of the Church in the Thought of Augustine of Hippo"

Mitchell Stevens, "Reflecting Divinity: A Translation and Commentary of Anastasius of Sinai's *Sermones in constitutionem hominis secundum imaginem Dei*"

David Justice, "King and Kingdom Violence: Thinking with Martin Luther King, Jr. Toward the Beloved Community"