

## Program-Level Assessment: Annual Report

Program: Undergraduate major

Department: Theological Studies

Degree or Certificate Level: B.A.

College/School: CAS

Date (Month/Year): Sept/2023

Primary Assessment Contact: Daniel Smith; Lori Baron

In what year was the data upon which this report is based collected? AY 2022-2023

In what year was the program's assessment plan most recently reviewed/updated? 2020

### 1. Student Learning Outcomes

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

#### Learning Objective #1:

Explain how Christian theology, including the Catholic tradition, engages ultimate questions about the nature of faith; the nature, existence, and personhood of God; the nature and ends of creation and human life; and evil (in ourselves and in the world) and salvation.

#### Learning Objective #2:

Describe how key historical texts, figures, and episodes have contributed to major doctrines of Christian theology.

### 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.

#### Learning Objective #1:

THEO 1600-1699 God-Talk: Ultimate Questions in Theology. One section (Sanders) was taught online. All others (Dunn, Sholl, Russell) were taught in person on the main campus.

Artifacts: Because there is some flexibility in how this course is taught, a variety of artifacts were used: spiritual autobiography (Dunn); five-page paper (Sholl); final paper (Russell); contemplative journal and spiritual autobiography (Sanders)

#### Learning Outcome #2:

THEO 3430: Teachings in the Christian Tradition: God and Christ. One section taught on the main campus in fall of 2022.

Artifacts: midterm, final, and final paper (this was the main artifact)

### 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.

THEO 1600 instructors (Dunn, Sholl, Russell, Sanders) used the rubric for Learning Outcome #1 to evaluate artifacts in their classes. See attached rubric.

THEO 3430 Instructor (Finucane) used the rubric for Learning Outcome #2 to evaluate an artifact in his class. See his attached rubric/evaluation, which specifies which artifacts he used to evaluate how students met these standards.

#### 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)?

##### **Learning Objective #1:**

Consolidating results of all four instructors, averaged out over all three standards within the rubric:

- Failed to meet expectations = 5%
- Met expectations = 70%
- Exceeded expectations = 25%

Overall, instructors had a high degree of success in addressing the various facets of the learning outcome. Results were slightly skewed by the results of the online course (Sanders), who had a very high percentage of students in the “exceeded expectations” category. This likely has more to do with the instructor’s assessment of student work than it has to do with teaching modality.

Failure to meet expectations had to do with failure to submit assignments, excessive absences from class, or poor reading comprehension.

Students who exceeded expectations tended to be invested in the course material, had a personal stake in the pursuit of ultimate questions, and engaged broadly and deeply with course material in their artifact(s).

##### **Learning Objective #2:**

THEO 3430: All eleven students either met or exceeded expectations. Students were motivated to interact deeply with course material. Some who met expectations expressed their ideas in a less sophisticated manner than others who exceeded expectations; the latter likely came in with a broader and deeper theological background.

#### 5. Findings: Interpretations & Conclusions

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

##### **Learning Objective #1:**

The redesigned THEO 1600 is working well to meet this objective. Instructors have the flexibility within the course design to structure the class around the learning objective as they choose and to select readings, assignments, exams, and papers that meet the learning outcome in a variety of ways. Most instructors used as their artifact some kind of personal reflection/spiritual autobiography centered upon one or more ultimate questions. Students who attended class and engaged with the material either met or exceeded expectations. Those students who struggled to meet the learning objective in its three criteria mostly failed to submit work or show up to class. Some misread or misunderstood aspects of the assignment (Dunn and Russell document this). By documenting areas of student misunderstanding, these areas can be addressed in future classes. This course “closes the loop” of the previous lack of continuity between sections of the old THEO 1000 course.

##### **Learning Objective #2:**

THEO 3430 is well designed to meet Learning Outcome #2. Graduating senior THEO majors mentioned that they liked this course in their exit interviews. Exams, discussions, and the final paper prepared students to situate the development of Christian doctrine within historical contexts. This course “closes the loop” discovered in previous assessments, when we observed that some students were not prepared at a high enough level for their Capstone course.

#### 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?

Findings will be discussed at the October meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee and reported to Daniel Smith.

- 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.

THEO 1600: Two ideas to help DTS faculty and graduate student instructors:

1. Have a meeting between graduate student instructors and the Coordinator of Undergraduate Students at the beginning of the semester in order to (a) help instructors deal with absentee students and students who fail to submit assignments; (b) to help those involved in assessment understand the learning outcome(s), how it is to be attached to an artifact(s), and how to evaluate whether the learning outcome is being met in individual cases.
2. Instructors selected to submit assessment reports must be held accountable for completing the rubric.

THEO 3430: This course as currently taught is meeting the learning objective.

If no changes are being made, please explain why.

Because the program learning outcome is overwhelmingly being achieved in THEO 3430, no changes are being recommended to the course design or to the undergraduate program.

## 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?

THEO 1600 was redesigned so that the numerous sections of this course would contain the same core elements.

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

This is the first year that THEO 1600 has been assessed; the data is contained in this report.

C. What were the findings of the assessment?

THEO 1600 is an improvement on the old course, THEO 1000. There is more consistency between different sections of the course, which is apparent in (1) the way the course is designed around ultimate questions; and (2) an emphasis upon personal reflection on ultimate questions both within and outside of the Catholic tradition. The majority of students are meeting or exceeding expectations.

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

This information will be shared with faculty and graduate student instructors in the Department of Theological Studies at a fall faculty meeting and a meeting with graduate students.

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

**Dan Finucane / Fall, 2022 / Teachings in the Christian Tradition: God and Christ**

**Learning Objective #2:**

“Describe how key historical texts, figures, and episodes have contributed to major doctrines of Christian theology.”

Rubric to be filled out by professor(s) teaching THEO 3430 and 3435 annually.

Note: An artifact/assignment/exam must serve as the basis for the evaluation of student achievement according to the following three standards. One artifact can be designed to assess one, two, or all three standards. Please indicate below the artifact/assignment/exam that you are using to evaluate student achievement in each of the three categories/standards. Please submit the instructions that you give your students for each relevant artifact/assignment/exam together with this rubric.

\* For the course as a whole, the **final paper was the central artifact.**

Please see the attached description below about this assignment.

*Assignment to assess Standard 1: regular class discussion, quizzes, **midterm** and **final exams**—especially portions that tested objective material: names, key phrases, authors, debate terms*

*Assignment to assess Standard 2: **exam essay questions** (MT and Final) and especially the **final paper***

*Assignment to assess Standard 3: **final paper** (and ongoing class discussions)*

Number of students in class:   11   (also one graduate student enrolled in THEO 5980)

Standard	Percentage (%) of Students Who...		
	Failed to Meet Expectations	Met Expectations	Exceeded Expectations
1. In their work, students were able to identify the key points of debate in relationship to major doctrines of Christian theology.		50%	50%

2. In their work, students were able to explain how key historical texts, figures, and episodes contributed to the formulation and/or development of these doctrines.		<b>50%</b>	<b>50%</b>
3. In their work, students were able to demonstrate a sensitivity to historical context.			<b>100%</b>

**Open-Ended Questions:**

1. Among students who exceeded expectations, what do you think were the key drivers of, or factors in, their success?

All of the students achieved a solid level of success in taking on the foundational course theme of development of doctrine. Some were more sophisticated than others, and some more actively engaged the course themes in their personal academic and faith commitments. Our discussions were regularly robust. Essay questions and the final paper showed a very strong understanding of how doctrines grapple with and are shaped through the experiences of people in specific historical contexts. We looked at how language, cultural challenges, and philosophical context shape doctrinal teachings historically and in contemporary expressions. Final papers especially showed students' use and understanding of these ideas; students were asked to cite historical contributors and make contemporary connections. All accomplished this, and some excelled at it. I marked the third standard category above as exceeding expectations, because I was pleased at how well this approach to doctrine was understood and expressed in student work.

2. Among students who failed to meet expectations, what do you think were the main obstacles to their success?

Though some students were more sophisticated than others, all students took up the basic challenges and resources of the class. Quizzes and exams and reflection papers showed that they moved through the semester well, taking up course themes and fulfilling the expectations I had for them in the course.

3. (Optional) If you as an instructor have ideas about how these standards can better be met in this course or within the major and minor in Theological Studies as a whole, please share them here.

I think the course is poised well to achieve its goals. I believe I can do better job of pacing the course to cover some topics more effectively. I would like to achieve a better balance of treatment with regard to method and content.

Students welcomed the chance to discuss areas that are challenging; topics included, the use of scripture, theodicy, the natures of Christ, the role of the Spirit in the Church, the relationship of science and faith, to offer just some examples. I also think it is important to introduce students who major or minor in theology to important authors and texts in the Vatican II and post-conciliar era. I did some of this and would like to more. I would also like to spend more time on Pope Francis in the future.

**Addendum on the final paper / artifact:**

**Basics:** due date, length 7-8 / double spaced, with **annotated works cited** (a sentence or two saying what the source is about, why it is reliable for a research paper).

**Select a major Christian doctrine.** Show how important historical contexts: texts, figures and events, contributed to the formulation or development of the doctrine as it is taught today.

What are the **key points** in any debates that formed the doctrinal expression?

Mary Dunn, Fall 2022

**Direct Measures: Rubrics for Instructor Assessment of Student Achievement of PLOs**

**Learning Objective #1:**

“1. \* Explain how Christian theology, including the Catholic tradition, engages ultimate questions about the nature of faith; the nature, existence, and personhood of God; the nature and ends of creation and human life; and evil (in ourselves and in the world) and salvation.”

Rubric to be filled out by seven (7) instructors teaching THEO 1600-1699 annually.

*Assignment serving as basis for evaluation:* Artifact to be available for submission to University Assessment Office for purposes of assessment of the SLU Core (for SLO 1): See Appendix.

*Number of students in class:* \_\_31\_\_

	Percentage (%) of Students Who...		
Standard	Failed to Meet Expectations	Met Expectations (B or above)	Exceeded Expectations (A or above)
1. In the artifact, students were able to articulate responses to ultimate questions found in the Christian tradition.	0%	80%	20%
2. In the artifact, students were able to demonstrate an accurate understanding of the meaning and implications of the ultimate questions considered.	0%	80%	20%
3. In the artifact, students were able to show familiarity with the Catholic tradition in terms of its longevity, breadth, and at least some of its particularities within Christianity and/or among religions of the world.	10%	70%	20%

### Open-Ended Questions:

1. Among students who exceeded expectations, what do you think were the key drivers of, or factors in, their success?

The flexibility of the course and the breadth implied in the ultimate questions that inform the course drove the more motivated students to think deeply about and really wrestle with the theological ideas introduced by the readings. The open-ended nature of the class discussions (which usually hovered and circulated around a few key questions brought up by the readings) prompted rich discussions and, again, encouraged many students to think deeply and reconsider their preconceived notions. The breadth implied in the ultimate questions and the near-infinite sub-questions nested beneath the bigger questions also guaranteed that themes and issues recurred regularly and organically throughout the semester. The final artifact, likewise, was broad enough that all students could find a way in, genuinely connecting at least one ultimate question to the circumstances of their own lives and in dialogue with the Christian tradition.

2. Among students who failed to meet expectations, what do you think were the main obstacles to their success?

All of the students in the class met the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> expectations for the course. I counted a few as “not meeting” the 3<sup>rd</sup> expectation only because the final artifact didn’t demand that students demonstrate familiarity with the longevity, breadth, and particularities of the Catholic tradition, *per se*. Although the course itself exposed students to the longevity, breadth, and particularities of the Catholic tradition (and although lower-stakes assessments throughout the course measured students’ familiarity with that material), the final artifact left room for students to engage primarily non-Catholic sources. If, in the end, some students did better than others in terms of the depth, creativity, and complexity of their thinking about the ultimate questions at stake, my sense is that this owes more to factors beyond the control of the course and the classroom.

3. (Optional) If you as an instructor have ideas about how these standards can better be met in this course or within the major and minor in Theological Studies as a whole, please share them here.



## Appendix

### Spiritual Autobiography Project

The final essay picks up where the midterm unessay left off, inviting you to try your hand at crafting your own (short) spiritual autobiography in dialogue with at least five sources we read together this semester. Although the midterm unessay is intended to prepare you for this final project, this assignment requires that you adopt a more explicitly autobiographical approach and produce a more conventional written essay.

Your spiritual autobiography must be 5-7 pages long, in 12-point Times New Roman Font, include page numbers, a title, and your name, my name, the course, and the due date in the upper right-hand corner of the first page. Although I want to give you the freedom to structure the paper in the way that seems best to you, your paper must do the following:

- Begin with a vivid description of a moment in time from your spiritual life (think Augustine's pear tree incident) in 1-2 pages. This can be a high spiritual moment, a low spiritual moment, the moment you lost faith in God, the moment you felt the presence of the dead, the moment you knew God was real—any moment that stands out to you from your own spiritual life. The goal here is to create a verbal picture, engaging your sensory memories to describe what you recall seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching about the moment.
- Engage at least one of the ultimate questions with which we wrestled this semester (What is faith? Who is God? What is the point of human life? What is evil? What is salvation?) in relation to the moment you describe from your spiritual life and in dialogue with at least three of the assigned texts. At least one of the texts you chose to engage with must be different from the texts you cited in your midterm unessay. The goal here is to get you to step back and reflect on the significance of this moment to the arc of your spiritual life in connection with the ultimate question you're considering and in conversation with course readings.
- Your paper should include at least three references to each of your sources. Please cite to sources using parenthetical references (author last name, page number).

Due to me as a Word attachment submitted via Canvas by 5:00 pm on **December 15**.

Spiritual Autobiography projects will be graded as follows:

An "A" paper vividly describes a moment in time from the student's spiritual life using a rich variety of sensory details; directly responds to one or more readily-identifiable ultimate questions; critically and actively engages with course material; includes references to and reflection on at least three course readings; contains fewer than 2 typos; follows all formatting rules; is written with proper grammar, syntax, and word usage; demonstrates insight, thoughtfulness, and complexity; and persuasively communicates a central idea or theme.

A "B" paper describes a moment in time from the student's spiritual life using some sensory details; directly responds to one or more readily-identifiable ultimate questions; engages with course material; includes references to and reflection on at least three course readings; contains fewer than 4 typos; follows most formatting rules; is written with minimal grammatical, syntactical, and word usage errors; demonstrates some insight and thoughtfulness; and communicates a central idea or theme.

A "C" paper describes a moment in time from the student's spiritual life using few sensory details; touches on but does not directly respond to one or more readily-identifiable ultimate questions; engages minimally with course material; does not include references to and reflection on at least three course readings; contains more than 4 typos; does not follow formatting rules; is written with significant grammatical, syntactical, and word usage errors; demonstrates little insight and thoughtfulness; and inadequately communicates a central idea or theme.

A paper of "D" or "F" quality does not respond to the requirements of the exercise, demonstrating a failure to communicate a central idea or theme, lack of engagement with course material, lack of insight and thoughtfulness, and failure to hew to grammatical, syntactical, word usage, and formatting rules.

**Craig Sanders THEO 1600 Fall 2022**

**Direct Measures: Rubrics for Instructor Assessment of Student Achievement of PLOs**

**Learning Objective #1:**

“1. \* Explain how Christian theology, including the Catholic tradition, engages ultimate questions about the nature of faith; the nature, existence, and personhood of God; the nature and ends of creation and human life; and evil (in ourselves and in the world) and salvation.”

Rubric to be filled out by seven (7) instructors teaching THEO 1600-1699 annually.

*Assignment serving as basis for evaluation:* Artifact to be available for submission to University Assessment Office for purposes of assessment of the SLU Core (for SLO 1).

*Number of students in class:*   39  

Standard	Percentage (%) of Students Who...		
	Failed to Meet Expectations	Met Expectations	Exceeded Expectations
1. In the artifact, students were able to articulate responses to ultimate questions found in the Christian tradition.	<b>2% (one student FQ'd who never participated)</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>60%</b>
2. In the artifact, students were able to demonstrate an accurate understanding of the meaning and implications of the ultimate questions considered.	<b>2%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>50%</b>
3. In the artifact, students were able to show familiarity with the Catholic tradition in terms of its longevity, breadth, and at least some of its particularities within Christianity and/or among religions of the world.	<b>2%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>38%</b>

### **Open-Ended Questions:**

1. Among students who exceeded expectations, what do you think were the key drivers of, or factors in, their success?

The first phase of the project was a contemplative journal, and I found the students who were most invested in this practice developed a sensory and emotional awareness that enhanced their spiritual autobiography. In addition, I think providing students the space to be vulnerable and honest, knowing that they were seen and cared for in my class, gave them the freedom to explore difficult and challenging life experiences and use those as an opportunity for resilience and theological reflection. I also modeled in my lecture videos how I was relating course readings to the ultimate questions, and successful students followed this practice in how they incorporated course readings in their final artifact.

2. Among students who failed to meet expectations, what do you think were the main obstacles to their success?

I had one student who never completed any assignments or watched any lectures in my online asynchronous course. Every student who participated in the course met expectations, but I did find the 8-week accelerated course limited the depth of their engagement because I wasn't able to provide feedback on drafts before the final submission.

3. (Optional) If you as an instructor have ideas about how these standards can better be met in this course or within the major and minor in Theological Studies as a whole, please share them here.

## Direct Measures: Rubrics for Instructor Assessment of Student Achievement of PLOs

### Learning Objective #1:

“1. \* Explain how Christian theology, including the Catholic tradition, engages ultimate questions about the nature of faith; the nature, existence, and personhood of God; the nature and ends of creation and human life; and evil (in ourselves and in the world) and salvation.”

Rubric to be filled out by seven (7) instructors teaching THEO 1600-1699 annually.

*Assignment serving as basis for evaluation:* Artifact to be available for submission to University Assessment Office for purposes of assessment of the SLU Core (for SLO 1).

The artifact was a 5 page paper.

Number of students in class:   47   (1600.26; 1600.L05)\_\_\_\_\_

Standard	Percentage (%) of Students Who...		
	Failed to Meet Expectations	Met Expectations	Exceeded Expectations
1. In the artifact, students were able to articulate responses to ultimate questions found in the Christian tradition.	~4	86	10
2. In the artifact, students were able to demonstrate an accurate understanding of the meaning and implications of the ultimate questions considered.	~4	86	10
3. In the artifact, students were able to show familiarity with the Catholic tradition in terms of its longevity, breadth, and at least some of its particularities within Christianity and/or among religions of the world.	~4	86	10

### **Open-Ended Questions:**

1. Among students who exceeded expectations, what do you think were the key drivers of, or factors in, their success?

Students who actively engaged with the materials in classroom discussion and demonstrated reading knowledge of the assigned texts. Engagement was evident in the analyses they brought to the paper prompt serving as the artifact.

2. Among students who failed to meet expectations, what do you think were the main obstacles to their success?

Students who either did not complete the assignment or were absent from class for significant periods of time.

3. (Optional) If you as an instructor have ideas about how these standards can better be met in this course or within the major and minor in Theological Studies as a whole, please share them here.

**Tracy Russell – Fall 2022**

**Direct Measures: Rubrics for Instructor Assessment of Student Achievement of PLOs**

**Learning Objective #1:**

“1. \* Explain how Christian theology, including the Catholic tradition, engages ultimate questions about the nature of faith; the nature, existence, and personhood of God; the nature and ends of creation and human life; and evil (in ourselves and in the world) and salvation.”

Rubric to be filled out by seven (7) instructors teaching THEO 1600-1699 annually.

*Assignment serving as basis for evaluation:* Artifact to be available for submission to University Assessment Office for purposes of assessment of the SLU Core (for SLO 1).

*Number of students in class:* \_\_\_39 (two sections)\_\_\_\_\_

	Percentage (%) of Students Who...		
Standard	Failed to Meet Expectations	Met Expectations	Exceeded Expectations
1. In the artifact, students were able to articulate responses to ultimate questions found in the Christian tradition.	8%	72%	20%
2. In the artifact, students were able to demonstrate an accurate understanding of the meaning and implications of the ultimate questions considered.	10%	69%	21%
3. In the artifact, students were able to show familiarity with the Catholic tradition in terms of its longevity, breadth, and at least some of its particularities within Christianity and/or among religions of the world.	20%	60%	20%

### Open-Ended Questions:

1. Among students who exceeded expectations, what do you think were the key drivers of, or factors in, their success?

In general these students seemed to come into the course with strong writing skills and sharp critical thinking skills. Many of the students who performed particularly well had some background with theology before entering the course, but not necessarily. I think the biggest factor was a genuine enjoyment of the course material and goals—the students who really wanted to reflect on these ultimate questions and engage the readings carefully generally did so.

2. Among students who failed to meet expectations, what do you think were the main obstacles to their success?
  - 8% of students did not turn in a final artifact.
  - A few students misunderstood the ultimate question, “What is the nature and end of creation/human life?” to mean, “What happens in the afterlife?” (We covered the afterlife under the ultimate question, “What is salvation?” which was not part of the final artifact.)
  - A number of students did not demonstrate an accurate understanding of the “Catholic” source they chose to interact with in their final artifact. They either did not summarize the text at all, or they chose one minor point from the text and claimed that that was the overarching argument of the source. A few students claimed the text said the opposite of what it actually says.
  - Because interacting with a “Catholic” source was only one component of the final assignment, even the students who struggled with that component generally did well on the assignment and in the course overall. (Over 80% of my students earned a grade of A- or higher in the course.)
3. (Optional) If you as an instructor have ideas about how these standards can better be met in this course or within the major and minor in Theological Studies as a whole, please share them here.