University of Hawai‘i – Honolulu Community College  
GENERAL EDUCATION - Diversification Designation  
Certification and Recertification  

Application Form  
(as of Spring 2011)

APPLICANT: David Panisnick  
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COURSE ALPHA and NUMBER:  REL 151

COURSE TITLE:  Religion and the Meaning of Existence

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF SECTIONS:  Fall 2  Spring 2 (Note: 1 professor teaches all sections)

Is this request for a:  
☐ New Course  ☐ Modified Course  ☒ Existing Course
☐ Re-designation

Is this request for a:  
☐ Certification  ☒ Re-Certification. Date of last certification: 2001

DIVERSIFICATION AREA DESIGNATION SOUGHT:

☐ DA (Arts)  ☐ DP (Physical Sciences)
☐ DB (Biological Sciences)  ☐ DS (Social Sciences)
☒ DH (Humanities)  ☐ DY (Laboratory)
☐ DL (Literature and Language)

What percentage of the CONTENT of this course focuses on this diversification area?  75%

What percentage of CLASS MEETINGS focuses on this diversification area?  75%

1. Please explain how the course SLOs align with the diversification area’s hallmark.

1. DH Hallmark 1: Uses the terminology of historical, philosophical, language or religious studies.

SLO 2: Write on a sufficiently abstract level so as to be able to integrate outside material (e.g., other classes, cultural) into the course content. Since this course is always presented as a writing intensive class by a single professor, the use of historical, philosophical and religious language is emphasized in written form. The SLO reflects an interdisciplinary approach. In addition to religion, history and philosophy are the two most referenced outside disciplines.

SLO 5: demonstrate an ability to convey "subjective" ideas, views and opinions without "personalizing" the material by referencing one's own experiences. This is probably the most difficult SLO for the students to grasp. The intent here is to acquaint the students with using
historical, philosophical and religious language to formulate their views and opinions without referencing their personal lives. This is the one SLO which I have to explain, as the concept is foreign to most students. Indeed, for many students this is akin to learning a foreign language.

DH Hallmark 2: Involves texts, artifacts, processes, theories or issues of concern in these studies. SLO 3: Analyze universal questions and problems in application to specific religious tradition responses. The "specific religious tradition responses" requires the study and analysis of religious writings, scriptural and otherwise; as well as religious beliefs (theories) and to some extent practices (processes). examples of universal questions and problems would be evil, deception and death. These are also examples for the hallmark's reference to "issues of concern."

SLO 6: Identify differences between religious and secular (e.g., philosophical) values and ethical traditions. Many issues of concern in religion are addressed by religious ethical traditions and values. And while the same issues of concern may be shared by secular traditions, their writings and theories for dealing with these issues are markedly different from religious approaches. For example, the difference between an emotional and a rational response is not always apparent to the students.

DH Hallmark 3: Demonstrates inquiry that involves the methods of study, reflection, evidence gathering, and argumentation that are employed in these studies. SLO 1: Through written interpretive analysis, extrapolate religious stories (myths) into explanations of religious teachings and meanings. The hallmark seems to be asking for critical thinking in the discipline. Religion relies heavily on telling stories and the course takes this seriously. However, myths are a particular kind of stories and require a different kind of interpretive analysis. A specific section of the course is dedicated to this.

SLO 4: Apply rational thinking to beliefs driven by emotional relevance. This SLO also puts an emphasis on critical thinking. Students have a surprisingly difficult time understanding what constitutes evidence. Nor have they given much thought to the idea that supernatural beliefs do not lend themselves to the gathering of evidence. Time is spent sorting out why people believe the things they believe and how beliefs based on the accumulation of one's experiences, based on the probability they may be true, differ from beliefs motivated by emotional relevance, needs and interests. This discussion is held early in the course and becomes a template for subsequent discussions.

Explanatory notes. The hallmarks (three for each designation) are posted on the HCC Istranet. In the text-box below, (a) re-state the hallmarks for the diversification designation you are seeking; (b) for each hallmark provide the course SLO(s) that meet each hallmark (statement of the SLOs and their numbers, e.g., SLO#1, should match what is given in the curriculum action form or course syllabus; and (c) explain how the SLO(s) meet each hallmark.

2. Explain assessment strategies you plan to use (or have used, in the case of recertification) to measure the degree to which students exit the course with the expected SLOs. If there are multiple sections of the course, please discuss how assessment will be carried through all sections.

Each section of the course tests by essay exams. The essays are structured so that specific SLOs
are imbedded in the essays. Examples: SLO 1: Analyze the Shinto creation myth as a legitimization of Japanese cultural values and mores. SLO 2: Select one of the urban legends discussed in class and discuss its counter-intuitive characteristics and its emotional relevance. SLO 3: How is the problem of deception solved by Chinese ancestor veneration? SLO 4: Discuss the differences between beliefs based on rational probability (science) and beliefs based on emotional relevance (religion). SLO 5: In your own words, analyze Hamlet's statement: "Meaning is but the slave of memory, of violent birth, but poor validity....What to ourselves in passion we propose, the passion ending doth the purpose lose." SLO 6: Provide and discuss an example of Dostoevski's "The Grand Inquisitor" in a secular context.

Also see attachment of proposal for assessing SLOs.

Explanatory notes. For this question, provide a clear connection between the course SLOs (e.g., understand research methodology) with assessment strategies (e.g., quizzes, final project). For multiple sections of the same course, provide a plan for coordinating and assessing these SLOs across sections.

3. How have you used the assessment findings to modify or improve this course?

The attachment on assessing SLOs explains how the findings are used to improve the course. Also, the importance of student success in the class is self-evident in this regard.

Explanatory notes. If this is a new course, enter “N/A” as an answer. Courses being re-certified should include a summary of how assessment strategies and measures (Question #2) were used to modify or improve the course. Again, if multiple sections of the course are offered, provide an explanation for review of assessment across sections.

Reminder: If this is an application for an EXISTING or MODIFIED course, please attach a copy of your course syllabus that includes information described in the instruction part of this form. If this is a new course proposal, please attach a copy of the Curriculum Action Proposal for a new course.

DIVERSIFICATION BOARD DECISION:

☑ Approved
Re-Certification Due: Fall 2016

☐ Not approved
If not approved, reasons for disapproval:

Diversification Chair Signature: Jennifer Higuchi Date: 9/7/11
 Course Description: Introduction to basic ideas and issues of contemporary religious thought related to the question: "What is the meaning of existence?"

1. INTRODUCTION.
   a. History and Nature of the Course.

2. WHAT IS RELIGION?
   a. The Depth Dimension.
   b. Primary Relationships.
   c. Religion and Nihilism.
   d. Religion and Ethics.
   e. Why Do People Believe the Things They Believe?

3. CREATION MYTHS.
   a. What is Myth?
   b. Memory and Meaning.
   d. The Genesis Mandate: Ethics and Autonomy.

4. MODERN MYTHOLOGIES.
   a. Urban Legends.
   b. Pseudo-Sciences.
   c. Ethical Implications of False or Unfounded Beliefs.

5. CULTS AND HERETICS.
   a. Institution vs. Spirit.
   b. Authority vs. Freedom.
   c. Belief or Faith.
   d. The Grand Inquisitor: Miracle, Mystery and Authority.

6. TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS APPROACHES TO THE MEANING OF EXISTENCE.
   a. Catholic Meritocracy.
   b. Protestant Experientialism.

MIDTERM
7. LIMITATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY: THE SEARCH FOR AN ETHIC.
   a. The Rebel and the Revolutionary.
   b. Job
   c. Judas
   d. Sisyphus

8. CLOWNS AND SAINTS.
   a. Crisis in Communication.
   b. Who are the Clowns?
   d. The Irony of Romance: The Friend-Lover Paradox.

9. DESIGN FOR ETHICS.
   a. The Problem Restated.
   b. Despair and Courage.
   c. Education and Ethics.

10. SCIENCE, ETHICS, AND RELIGION.
    a. Prisoner's Dilemma.
    b. Tit for Tat.
    c. Kin Selection and Reciprocal Altruism.

FINAL EXAM

Leszek Kolokowski, Freedom, Fame, Lying, and Betrayal.

Requirements: 1. Two exams of equal worth and each covering approximately one-half of the course. 2. A Journal. Students will be expected to keep a written account of their thoughts, views and opinions regarding class discussions and readings. (See additional comments for Writing Intensive Class).

Office: Bldg. 7-623
Hours: MW: 7:30-8:30; 1-2; T.4-5.
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SLO: Student Learning Opportunities.

Upon completion of the course a student should be able to:

1. Through written interpretive analysis, extrapolate religious stories (myths) into explanations of religious teachings and meanings.
2. Write on a sufficiently abstract level so as to be able to integrate outside material (e.g., other classes, cultural) into the course content.
3. Analyze universal questions and problems in application to specific religious tradition responses.
4. Apply rational thinking to beliefs driven by emotional relevance.
5. Demonstrate an ability to convey “subjective” ideas, views and opinions without “personalizing” the material by referencing one’s own experiences.
6. Identify differences between religious and secular (e.g., philosophical) values and ethical traditions.

**Prerequisites and General Education Core:** Prerequisite: “C” or higher in ENG 100 or placement in ENG 209-260. Courses designated HETH in the focus column and HCC-E before the course title to fulfill the Contemporary Ethical Issues requirement for HCC’s Associate of Arts Degree. Students transferring to UHM will also be required to pass an E-focus (ETH) course at the 300 or 400 level to fulfill their graduation requirements for a BA or BS degree.

Rel. 151 fulfills a general education requirement for the A.S., A.A.S., and A.T.S. degrees in (c) Understanding the social environment.
Rel. 151 fulfills a general education requirement for the A.A. degree in Arts, Humanities, and Literature in Group 2: Humanities (AHL2).

**Writing Intensive Requirement:** In order to fulfill the Writing Intensive Requirement for this class, you will have to complete an extended assignment. This assignment involves the keeping of a Journal. The Journal is to consist of your thoughts, ideas, and opinions regarding class lectures, discussions, and readings. In addition to the class content, you may also include material from outside sources such as other classes, movies, newspapers etc. However, you should always try to tie outside material into course content.

I neither expect nor desire your journal to be personal other than as a reflection of your ideas. A Journal is not a diary. Its intent is to force you to develop thinking and writing on an abstract level. We all have beliefs and assumptions, prejudices and presuppositions. I want you to examine these aspects of your intellectual life in terms of the course material.

The minimum requirement for a Writing Intensive Class is 16 double-spaced type written pages.

The student will have the responsibility of submitting written material on a periodic basis. After receiving this material, I will edit for grammar and style and in most cases will expect you to re-write material. You may submit your journal as often as you like. The journal must not be graded for content. You should feel free to disagree with the instructor in expressing your own thoughts.

I will not be grading the journal each time you submit it. It will be graded at the end of the semester when you turn in your final draft. This is not a difficult assignment if you keep up with the work.

The journal will comprise 50% of your final grade.

The instructor for this class makes two basic assumptions:

1. Students are adults, and as such, are prepared to take responsibility for their education.
2. There is life outside of Rel. 151. Many of you have jobs, children, other classes etc. In addition, life is not always predictable.

With these assumptions in mind, I allow you the utmost freedom with regard to when and how often you submit your journal entries. The more often you give me material to edit, the more feedback you receive. Be advised that your final writing intensive component
grade will in part be reflective of your diligence and resolve in this matter.

Evaluation of Journals: Journals will be evaluated on grammar and thought:

Grammar: In order to receive a grade of “C” or better, the journal must satisfy the minimum requirements of college level writing (ENG. 100).

Thought:

“C” grade: Journal reflects basic understanding of course material, albeit lectures composed in student’s own words.
“B” grade: Journal demonstrates ability to apply course concepts to extra-course material (e.g., world events, ideas from other classes).
“A” grade: Journal demonstrates ability to critically analyze class concepts on an intellectually abstract level with independence of thought.

Ethics Focus Area Requirement:

Religion 151 is an option for the Ethics Focus Area Requirement. In this class we will discuss many of the varied religious (and non-religious) ethical systems. We will also examine what is meant by the question of the Meaning of Existence. We will look at various ways in which the question can be approached, the role of Ethics within the context of a broader over-all system of values, and practical contemporary and traditional approaches to modern day ethical problems.

Specific ethical issues discussed in class will probably vary from semester to semester, and even from class to class, section to section. However, it is the instructor’s conviction that student’s best facilitate their own ethical deliberations, not so much from analyzing this problem or that problem, as much as from engaging in critical thinking, rationally based, and with an obligation to make sense. The more one does this, although here practice never makes perfect, the better chance one has of getting through life with less rather than more regret.

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RATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

A Proposal
by
Fumiko Takasugi and David Panisnick

The most curious part of the thing was, that the trees and other things around them never changed their places at all: however fast they went they never seemed to pass anything. “I wonder if all the things move along with us?” thought poor puzzled Alice. And the Queen seemed to guess her thoughts, for she cried, “Faster! Don’t try to talk!”

Lewis Carrol, Through The Looking-Glass

INTRODUCTION:

Years ago, when we were first alerted to the necessity of developing Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) for our courses, we were also advised that we would eventually have to demonstrate that we were delivering on the promise, that we were actually teaching what we were claiming to teach as “contracted” in the SLOs.

Now, we may be wrong about this, and we are certainly open to correction, but it seems that between then and now, the mandate, or at least the language of the mandate, has become subsumed into the assessment conundrum. In other words, there is a difference between demonstrating that SLOs are being taught, and how well they are being taught. The first question seeks to extract information, as for instance in whether some SLOs are being taught more than others. This we think can be quantitatively measured. The second, the assessment question, which proposes to measure quality of instruction, has been beleaguered by much criticism and faculty debate. For example, how can an instructor’s effectiveness in teaching SLOs be evaluated without accounting for the student’s role in their own learning through motivation and work ethic? Does all of the responsibility fall on the instructor if the outcomes are not met? How much?

We are proposing a method by which to measure which SLOs in any given course and class are being taught more, less, or not at all, specifically in relation to each other. We are not claiming to be able to demonstrate how well the SLOs are being taught.

THE PROCESS:

1. The form (Fig. 1) is completed at or near the end of the semester by the students in the class and the instructor.
2. The form (Fig. 1) simply consists of all SLOs for the course listed and each accompanied by a box in which to insert a numerical value.
3. The SLOs are to be ranked according to the perceptions of how much the SLO had indeed been addressed/communicated during the course.
4. Assume five SLOs. Each SLO is ranked utilizing each number 1 through 5. 1 indicates the SLO having been most impressed upon the students, 5 the least. (Fig. 2)
5. The class ranking is then tabulated. (Fig. 3) Assume 20 students in a class. The best possible score a single SLO could receive would be 20 (1 x 20). The worst possible score would be 100 (5 x 20).
6. The instructor is then able to compare his or her own ranking with the overall class ranking.

7. The degree to which the class ranking is consistent with the instructor's ranking indicates how well the instructor is in touch with which SLOs are being communicated and which SLOs require attention.

8. If the student rankings show a high degree of inconsistency with the instructor's ranking, then there is a "dissonance factor" which needs to be addressed. (Fig. 4)

9. For those courses having more than seven SLOs, it might be better to create separate groupings for ranking purposes (e.g., eight SLOs, two groups of four). Or, an instructor might limit the number of SLOs to be rated.

10. Final tabulations will include four categories:

   a. % of students who completely agree: rated (1).
   b. % of students who strongly agree: rated (1) + (2).
   c. % of students who completely disagree: rated (3).
   d. % of students who strongly disagree: rated (5) + (4).

VALUE OF THE RANKING SYSTEM:

1. We are actually measuring what we claim to measure.

2. Any instructor who participates in the exercise should be motivated to start thinking or continue thinking about communicating SLOs.

3. Strengths and weaknesses. The exercise should provide a fairly accurate snapshot of which SLOs are "getting through" in comparison to those SLOs which are being neglected.

4. Reality check. What is the degree of dissonance between the instructor's and the classes' perception of learning SLOs? This is worth knowing.

5. Over a number of semesters, the process could constructively result in changing or re-shaping SLOs.

6. The process lends itself to Program analysis.

7. Administering and completing ranking forms should take two minutes at most. Elegant when considered in terms of amount and value of feedback.

8. The main advantage of the rating system over an assessment is that it renders null the bane of student assessments which are heavily influenced by anticipation of final grade and personal likeability of the instructor, neither of which have anything to do with quality teaching; and, neither of which can have any influence on the ranking.

AFTERTHOUGHTS:

1. It is possible that some SLOs are effectively communicated in spite of an instructor's efforts, perhaps because of the structure of the course or the instructor's approach to the discipline. This would be good to know.

2. Some SLOs might receive poor scores because they are too ambitious or too abstractly phrased (students don't know what they mean). This would be good to know.

3. College instructors, like everyone else, tend to view their own performance as comparatively superior. This is partly due to an absence of familiarity with what other instructors are actually doing. Where we have more than one instructor in a discipline, our rating system should provide a motivation for intra-discipline dialogue, especially when instructors show significant discrepancies in regard to specific SLOs.

4. Where there are multiple sections of the same course taught by the same instructor, a strong similarity in results would signal a greater approximation to objectivity.
5. Program review. The rating system, when administered over several semesters, should show improvement in teaching specific SLOs. This has relevance for accreditation.

6. Generally, the rating system could be referred to as an assessment. Some may see institutional value in this. However, we think the distinction between the two as expressed in the introduction is relevant.

7. There are a number of options for administering the rating system:

   a. Along with other evaluations: class, W, E, in 7-620.
   b. In class, manually. The simplicity of the system would allow for the instructor to choose a day toward the end of the semester when more, rather than less students are in class.

8. If the Division supports the rating system, we should discuss whether it should be voluntary.

9. The rating system does not require the protective shield of secrecy demanded of other evaluations.

10. Alice and the Red Queen. For those who believe in and or strive for excellence, our rating system might seem counter-intuitive at best or counter-productive at worst. Even the most monumental effort to resuscitate a (5) into a (1), will only consign another SLO into a (5). Progress is always relative and guarantees another defeat. And so, the SLO rating system will not be of any use for those instructors who are already teaching all SLOs excellently.