Part 1: PRE-EXIT INTERVIEW PROGRAM ASSESSMENT FORM  
Department of Religious Studies, Missouri State University

Student's Name: 

Permanent E-mail: 

Interviewers' Name: Dr. Pulleyking (Advisor) 

Dr. Finch (Assessment Committee Member) 

The Department of Religious Studies, like all departments at MSU, is required to assess our program based on the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) that we support. Our three SLOs are the following: 

1) Students will recognize and understand diverse manifestations of religion(s). 
2) Students will demonstrate critical and creative cognitive skills while studying religion(s). 
3) Students will demonstrate in both oral and written form their critical analyses and interpretations of religious phenomena. 

The exit interview consists of two parts. In the first part, you will write out answers to questions, which directly relate to our SLOs. In the second part, you will meet with two faculty and discuss all the questions in both parts 1 and 2. 

Instructions: 1) Please type answers to the following questions (1-5) about your experience with our major, BEFORE coming to the exit interview itself; one paragraph for each question is sufficient. 2) Bring three copies of your typed answers to the Exit Interview. 

1. How has your work in the major demonstrated that you can both recognize and understand diverse manifestations of religion(s)? Or, to state it differently, do you have a better understanding of the diversity of religious thought, experience, practices, and institutions in human culture(s)? If so, please share an example of this understanding from your work. This might be from a paper or class project or another class-related experience. Please cite the paper or other work and the class. 

Throughout most of the religious studies courses I have taken, I have encountered diverse manifestations of religion. A concise example of where I encountered diversity of thought and experience was in Dave Embree’s New Religious Movements course. During that semester, we examined many different worldviews and belief systems and how they operate in our world. In a research assignment I had to do for Mr. Embree’s class, I wrote a paper that included a personal interview with a local Latter-day Saint. That project alone showed me the remarkable similarities that this so-called “cult” shares with mainstream Christianity. 

2. How has your work in the major demonstrated your critical cognitive skills? For example, were you able to interpret and/or paraphrase what you were learning? Were you able to compare and contrast different ideas? Were you able to identify, present, and analyze arguments? Were you able to cite evidence to support an argument in a clear manner? Were you able to state results and draw conclusions? Please provide one or two specific examples and from which classes the examples come. 

A great deal of my critical cognitive skills were developed in Dr. Watts-Belser’s Judaism seminar. Every class session was set up to be conversational in nature, so it was a welcoming environment to share ideas and concepts over the
material found in the readings. Oftentimes, even after writing a reflection paper over the assigned reading(s), I would come out of a class discussion with an entirely new view on the subject based on sharing and collaborating with other students in the class. Dr. Watts-Belser conducted the class in such a way that all students were asked to come into the discussion with an open mind and a realization that class time was an opportunity to draw new conclusions and learn from our peers.

3. How has your work in the major demonstrated creative cognitive skills? For example, were you able to identify with or understand the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of others, past, and present? Were you able to imagine alternative points of view or ways of life and beliefs both across time and social and physical space? Were you able to be a storyteller, using written and spoken words to make sense of something, or to theorize about something? Please provide an example from a class, paper(s), presentation or project when your work demonstrated creativity (e.g. if you produced any creative and original project in art, literature, music, or film).

My creative cognitive skills came to light mostly in classes that I took with Dr. Baynes. In the Literature and World of the New Testament course, during my first semester at MSU, I was introduced to the concept of studying scripture objectively. This experience made learning about the origins of the Bible far more interesting, and introduced me to the concept of viewing Jesus as a historical figure rather than a divine one. Also, in Dr. Baynes’ Apocalypses course, we were introduced to different interpretations of apocalyptic literature and how different groups use these scriptures to view the end times. It was a very informative experience to learn about whom the original texts were intended for and how they are used today. The area that I felt evoked the most creativity, though, would have to have been my “Who is Jesus?” essay for the Jesus of Nazareth course that Dr. Baynes also teaches. I, as a former Catholic and recent agnostic, had not yet really come to terms with who Jesus of Nazareth was to me. This assignment, which was seemingly simple and opinion-based, really instilled in me a sense of yearning for knowledge about the historical Jesus. Essentially, I was creating a person who I once called my “Savior” and turning him into a Jewish man who lived 2000 years ago. This assignment was one that really required a great deal of creativity and thoughtfulness as I ventured down a path that I had not yet travelled.

4. How have you demonstrated in written work your ability to critically analyze and interpret religious phenomena? Please describe a paper or project (and the course) that illustrates your writing skills. Have those skills improved through our program? How?

My best piece of writing, in this program, was my seminar paper for the Theories of Religion capstone class with Dr. Berkowitz. In that paper, I used Ninian Smart’s theory on the experiential dimension of religion to evaluate the “burning in the bosom” phenomenon in LDS theology. Using Smart’s theory led me to value his insistence on objectivity in the academic study of religion, which also gave me a greater appreciation for the work that our department does to remain objective. In writing that paper, it surprised me that I could write a 12-page paper, on such a narrow topic, with relative ease. Writing is a large component of all courses offered in this department, which is a great service to the students (even
we don’t realize it at the time). My writing skills have greatly improved because of the religious studies faculty’s insistence on grammar, spelling, and punctuation, in addition to well-articulated content.

Estimate the number of research-based papers you have written 10.  
Estimate the number of other types of papers you have written 17.  
Estimate the number of projects in which writing was a part 5.  

5. How have you demonstrated in oral form your ability to critically analyze and interpret religious phenomena? Please describe your oral communication skills and describe a presentation you have given for a Religious Studies class. Can you comment on how your ability to communicate your ideas orally may have improved through the program?

There are far fewer instances of in-class oral presentations than papers or research assignments in this department. However, when presentations did come up in classes, I always felt prepared and capable to handle both presenting my material along with fielding questions about my research. The environment put forth by professors during presentations also made presenting less daunting and led to more lively discussions after the presentation was over. The best example of one of these presentations would have to be my experience of presenting on Ninian Smart in REL580. Dr. Berkowitz made the potentially terrifying 15-minute long presentation far more approachable by conducting the class in a way that was not inherently intimidating. The question and answer session after the presentation was also conducted in a way that invited conversation among the class and was not an onslaught of specific questions targeted at the presenter.

Estimate the number of in-class oral presentations you have made 8.  
Estimate the number of in-class discussions you have led 5.  
Estimate the number of other oral assignments you have done, such as oral exams 0.
Part 2: Exit Interview Discussion Questions

Department of Religious Studies, Missouri State University

Student's Name:

1. Generally, describe your experience in the Religious Studies Department.

   "I got raped i i REL 100 with Dr. Pulleying. " Her mom told her she’d do religion. A whole different way of thinking about Religion. 102 - Dr. Boyseo - a new way of thinking about Christianity.

2. In your experience, what is the greatest strength of MSU’s Religious Studies Department?

   - "The objectivity in studying religion." - Every professor in this dept. - you can never tell what anybody thinks.
   - "Learning how to write papers. Dr. Boyseo spent a lot of time on grammar.

3. What can we do better in the Department? Do you have specific recommendations, e.g., courses you wish we offered?

   - "Opportunities to argue a position that is not your own."
   - "Every class, every semester I was so excited about.

4. What are your future plans?

   - Special Education Counselor, MSU
   - High School Guidance Counselor

Signatures of Interviewers:

Date: 

Date: 4/28/14