A. Religious Studies Mission Statement

The Religious Studies discipline seeks to provide students with the opportunity to explore the role and significance of religion in human life and culture, to grapple with the ultimate issues religion addresses, to reflect critically on the nature and meaning of diverse religious beliefs and practices, and to investigate thoughtfully those biblical, historical, theological, and ethical sources that contribute to the Christian heritage, particularly the Catholic tradition.

It is our mission that students who enroll at St. Norbert College broaden their knowledge and skills, but also seriously engage questions about meaning, such as the nature of the human person, the relation of the human person to the community and world, and, ultimately, God and God’s relation to the human person and the world. Many of our disciplines at St. Norbert College address critical issues of existence and meaning, but Religious Studies courses do so in a particularly focused and courageous way.

We strive to teach majors and minors in Religious Studies the following skills and competencies:

- To cultivate a critical awareness of and appreciation for the Catholic Christian tradition, its breadth and trajectory.
- To examine and promote an understanding of the nature, scope and significance of religion as it is embedded in diverse cultures and contexts.
- To investigate how the Christian tradition informs and is informed by its historical situations.
- To demonstrate knowledge of the biblical sources of Jewish and Christian heritages.
- To enhance proficiency in the use of analytical tools and scholarly methods germane to the academic study of religion, thus increasing the capacity of students to interpret critically and appraise biblical, historical, theological, ethical and comparative materials.
- To foster thoughtful evaluations of and informed responses to ideas and practices relevant to the ethical, spiritual and ecclesiological dimensions of the Catholic heritage.
- To empower a greater integration of faith and work in the lives of students, especially as concerning the aspect of vocation.
• To encourage students to engage in deep and personal reflection on the significance of religious and theological ideas for their own lives.

• To encourage the continuing positive impact of Religious Studies majors in the community.

B. Relation to SNC Mission

St. Norbert College embraces the Norbertine ideal of *communio*, providing “an educational environment that fosters intellectual, spiritual and personal development.” We understand our work in Religious Studies as supporting this mission.

First, a note about *communio*, which is described in the SNC mission statement as “characterized by mutual esteem, trust, sincerity, faith and responsibility”… “lived through open dialogue, communication, consultation and collaboration.” As a discipline, we strive for *communio* by consistently interacting with one another in trust and mutual esteem. Our gatherings, whether they be formal or informal, are marked by: a deliberate inclusion of multiple voices; careful listening; a willingness to disagree in charity; true consultation and collaboration, in which each gives of his or her gifts and benefits from the gifts of others; and a spirit of affirmation and support. This is no small matter. We believe that part of our responsibility as faculty members at St. Norbert College is to show respect for one another as colleagues with academic knowledge from which we can learn and, most importantly, as persons with inherent dignity.

In particular, our courses expose students to the Catholic intellectual tradition, which—in the words of the SNC mission statement—“calls us to: seek truth through an ongoing dialogue between faith and reason; recognize the sacred dignity of all persons; utilize knowledge in working toward a Gospel vision of justice; affirm the goodness encountered in creation and culture; and scrutinize reality in an effort to add to the treasury of human wisdom.” While courses in other disciplines surely engage the Catholic intellectual tradition in these ways as well (not to mention co-curricular efforts in this regard), Religious Studies faculty are in a unique position to engage students in a sustained way with the resources of Catholic intellectual tradition due to the content of our courses.

We also support the mission by helping students “understand diverse cultures, perspectives and beliefs,” particularly as they pertain to religious traditions and scriptures. In addition, we help students consider what it means to be human in relation to God, others, and the created world. Our hope is that students will recognize their connection to others and their responsibilities to a common good in which they share.
C. The Vision of the Religious Studies Discipline

The Religious Studies discipline is presently a vibrant community of teacher-scholars whose training and expertise cover the following necessary areas in theological and religious studies (i.e., biblical exegesis, systematic and ecumenical theology, theologies of religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue, the history of Christianity, ethics). In five years’ time, we envision a discipline of eight full-time faculty, due to the addition of a specialist in liturgical studies, as befits a nationally ranked Catholic liberal arts college. And, indeed, the College’s Norbertine heritage would make this addition all the more fitting.

A revised curriculum will graduate majors with the knowledge and skills necessary to critically interpret the Catholic tradition in its various historical and cultural manifestations. In the larger life of the College, the discipline will play a robust role, primarily by its continued presence in a two-course General Education requirement, but also in the Master of Theological Studies and the Master of Liberal Studies programs, and the minors in Peace and Justice, Women's and Gender Studies, American Studies, and Classical Studies. Cognizant of the distinctive public nature of the theologian, the discipline, both as a whole and individually, will engage in educational outreach in the Green Bay diocese and larger community.

D. The Input, Goals, and Action Steps for Year One:

1. a. Input: Assessment data indicates that there are three areas in need of our attention: we need more courses that address diverse religious traditions, that majors are not confident in their researching skills and need more training in accessing and interpreting primary sources. Our majors are underserved in terms of dedicated courses. Since 2005 we have hired three new faculty who specialize in areas that meet the needs of majors; Betsy Bauman in biblical and gender studies, Karen Park in history of Christian traditions and historical theologies, and Mara Brecht in theologies of religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue. In light of these hires and a review of peers and aspirants, we will expand our offerings of dedicated courses to provide a more comprehensive theological and religious studies training along with adequate flexibility for our current majors -- a step we believe will also attract new majors. Program requirements, course offerings, and descriptions need to be updated to reflect new expertise and environments.

b. Goal: To revise the major and minor in response to assessment data to more clearly address the needs of our majors for more majors courses, dovetail with the strengths of our faculty and maintain our commitment to the needs of the college through related programs (e.g., Peace and Justice, American Studies, Women’s and Gender Studies, Masters of Theology, Masters of Liberal Studies, Classical Studies).
c. Action steps for year one:

- Meet every two weeks as a discipline to conceptualize and articulate the curricular requirements of a religious studies major and minor.
- Produce in the first year reconfigured lists of required courses for the major/minor and revised descriptions of current offerings.
- Revise the content of current course offerings, create new courses, reconfigure our course rotation, and concomitantly edit our section of the Course Catalog.

2. a. Input: Assessment and demographic data show that majors/minors have declined slightly since 2005, and are presently holding steady at approximately 40 majors and minors.

   b. Goal: Increase our major and minor numbers.

   c. Action steps for year one: Make our major more visible by updating our website and offering events to better articulate the identity of Religious Studies and its relevance for faith, the liberal arts, and the local and global communities. Our first effort in this light is a panel planned for November at which discipline faculty will present and facilitate discussion among students and community members on the impending changes to the Catholic liturgy.

3. a. Input: Faculty discussions on revising General Education requirements suggest that there is general confusion among the faculty at large about what the goals of the newly proposed area of the Catholic Imagination.

   b. Goal: To articulate a rationale that, in light of realities both internal and external to St. Norbert College, argues for the retention of a two-course theology requirement (introductory and upper-level) in any revised general education program.

   c. Action steps for year one: Advocate our position with Dean Frick and Kevin Quinn and prepare resources and rationales to make our case with all other relevant faculty and administrative stakeholders.