

**Assessment Findings and Curricular Improvements
School of Theology and Religious Studies
Undergraduate Programs**

Assessment Measures

The School of Theology and Religious Studies uses the following measures to assess learning outcomes:

BA in Theology & Religious Studies

- Capstone peer teaching project and paper
- Pass rates on comprehensive examinations
- Grades, course evaluations, and enrollment totals for capstone seminar
- Grades, course evaluations, and enrollment totals for introductory course
- Student publications
- Focus group interviews with students

Certification in Pastoral Ministry

- Grades, course evaluations, and enrollment totals for capstone seminars
- Internship supervisor ratings of students performance
- Job placement rates
- Focus group interviews with students

**Assessment Findings
BA in Theology & Religious Studies**

Senior Seminar Discussion (Attachment 1):

The School of Theology and Religious Studies (STRS) analyzed course grade, evaluation, and enrollment data in TRS 495 Capstone Seminar for a four-year period (Fall 2004 through Fall 2007).

During this period, enrollment in the senior seminar surged from 4 to 10, followed by 11 and then another surge to 20. While this indicates a growing trend of interest in the program we know that there will only be two Senior TRS Majors in Fall 2008. A comparison with TRS 101 Introduction to Theology (Attachment 2) shows that next year's senior cohort began with a large number of students (24). Actions taken to stem this troubling trend reflected in the attrition rate of this particular year group are addressed below.

Student opinion of the senior seminar (TRS 495) was low in 2004 and 2005. A marked increase in satisfaction with both the course and the instructor followed in 2006 and 2007. The same pattern of low student satisfaction in 2004 and 2005 followed by a two-fold increase in satisfaction in 2006 and 2007 can be seen in the introductory course (TRS 101). There appears

to be a correlation between the low satisfaction seen in 2004 and 2005 with the two most important courses in the STRS program and the attrition rate noted above. Likewise, the two-fold increase in satisfaction in 2006 and a similar high degree of satisfaction in 2007 for both courses correlates with changes made in these two courses.

Since the number of students in the TRS program is too low for a meaningful comparison with data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), STRS relies on three direct measures of assessing student outcomes specific to the goals for student learning. These measures are (1) the peer teaching project and (2) peer review of proposed term paper topics within the Capstone Seminar. All students are then encouraged to submit their senior seminar paper (or another major term paper) paper for publication. The acceptance rate of student papers for publication provides a third measure of assessing student outcomes.

The peer teaching project was instituted in Fall 2006 to make the capstone seminar to more like the learning environment encountered in a graduate seminar. Students were given an opportunity to present one of the topics covered within the seminar and then facilitate seminar discussion about this particular topic. The opportunity to teach and then lead an academic discussion with peers resulted in improved student outcomes in the areas of articulating the central aspects of the Catholic theological tradition as well as an understanding of issues arising from religious diversity in today's world. Likewise, the incorporation of peer review of seminar paper topics resulted in improved student outcomes in the area of acquiring the ability to do high-quality research in the field using the fundamental tools of scholarship. The average grade of the seminar papers was significantly higher and the majority of the papers written were of the quality required for submission for publication. In 2007 and again in 2008 a paper from a student in the capstone seminar was accepted for publication in the Journal of *Theta Alpha Kappa*, the National Honor Society for Religious Studies and Theology.

Introductory Course Discussion (Attachment 2):

As mentioned above, a large number of students began the program (24) in what will be the senior cohort next year of only two students. In a pattern also seen with the senior capstone course, the performance of students in the introductory course (TRS 101) and student judgment of the course show a marked increase in both average grades and satisfaction with both the course and the instructor. The low satisfaction seen in 2004 and 2005 saw an increase in satisfaction in 2006 and a similar high degree of satisfaction in 2007.

In 2006 an introductory textbook, *The College Student's Introduction to Theology*, was incorporated into the curriculum for TRS 101. This helped to structure the course, which is a survey of the subdisciplines within Theology and Religious Studies. The weekly written assignments moved away from reflection papers to short assignments designed to introduce students to concepts and methods of the particular area within theological study being presented.

Comprehensive Exams:

Data on the pass rates on senior assessments (both comprehensive exams and senior thesis) were analyzed for a four year period (45 total students). All but one student passed the senior

assessment on the first attempt with approximately 10% earning a Pass with Honors distinction. Beginning next year STRS will no longer offer the thesis option and, henceforth, will have a single comprehensive assessment measure by which all TRS seniors will be assessed. The reason for this change is that it was judged that the exam is the better assessment of student outcomes requiring conversance and critical thinking on a range of important theological/religious issues.

Focus group interviews of graduating seniors provided data relevant to other objectives and the learning environment for our majors. Most significantly is the expressed desire for greater academic challenge throughout the program. This included the opportunity to begin Theology and Religious Study in earnest as freshmen and reducing the required number of lower level courses (currently 5 out of 12 total for major) thus giving them the ability to take a greater number of higher level courses.

Curricular Improvements

STRS underwent a major undergraduate curriculum change in 2003 based on student and faculty feedback on a mandatory introductory course for all students that sought to cover such a wide range of topics that it tended towards superficial treatment of each area. This approach did not provide a tiered educational process whereby lower level courses prepare students for the upper level. After five years of offering introductory level courses in each of the areas of concentration, followed by a variety of options in refined upper level courses in each area, course evaluations indicate greater student satisfaction with the revised curriculum structure.

While TRS majors have benefited from some aspects of the university-wide undergraduate curriculum improvement the data indicated a need to address certain aspects of courses proper to them. The introductory course needed more academic rigor and structure. This was achieved by the incorporation of a textbook and the refocusing of a weekly assignment. The on-going review of data from this introductory course indicates that a further increase in the academic component is necessary for the student outcomes (and STRS objectives) particular to TRS majors and minors. The capstone seminar benefited by the incorporation of the peer teaching and paper review components, making the seminar more like the graduate seminar experience intended. Specific curricular improvements currently under consideration are ways to enhance TRS major (and minor) desire for challenge by lessening the introductory course requirement and expanding opportunities for upper level study.

Assessment Findings Certification in Pastoral Ministry

Capstone Seminars Discussion (Attachments 3 & 4):

Enrollment, student grades and course evaluation data were analyzed for the two 400-level seminars that together provide the capstone experience for students in the Certification for

Pastoral Ministry program. The lack of course evaluation data in TRS 450 (Internship: Pastoral Ministry) is an unfortunate oversight of a critical assessment measure. This data will be part of all future assessment analysis beginning with spring term 2008. There was nothing in the enrollment or grade distribution data that provided an actionable finding.

Currently, the best assessment measures of the program are the Internship supervisor ratings of students' performance and job placement rates upon graduation. The vast majority of supervisor ratings have assessed the student's performance as outstanding. The ratings showed that those students who had taken TRS 453 (The Practice of Pastoral Ministry) prior to their Internship tended to be more confident and competent. Focus group interviews confirmed student preference to have this course and the practical tools it offers before the internship. Two years of job placement data indicate that of those graduates seeking a position on a parish staff or within a Catholic School, all were hired and reported that their Certification in Pastoral Ministry from CUA provided them with an advantage in the selection process.

Curricular Improvements

TRS 450, the course that guides students through Theological Reflection on their Pastoral Ministry Internship experiences, began incorporating select core competencies from the National Lay Ecclesial Ministry Standard in 2007. This structure was further expanded in 2008 as the need for a clear understanding of the specific areas required for professional competency in ministry is essential given the ever increasing expectations of the Lay Minister.

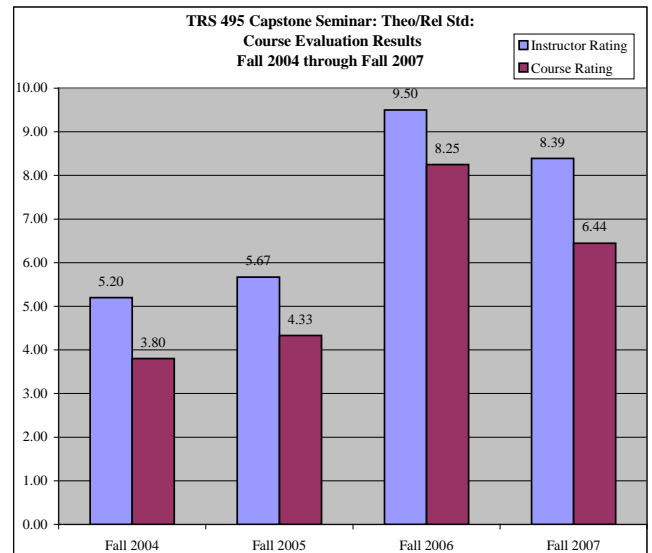
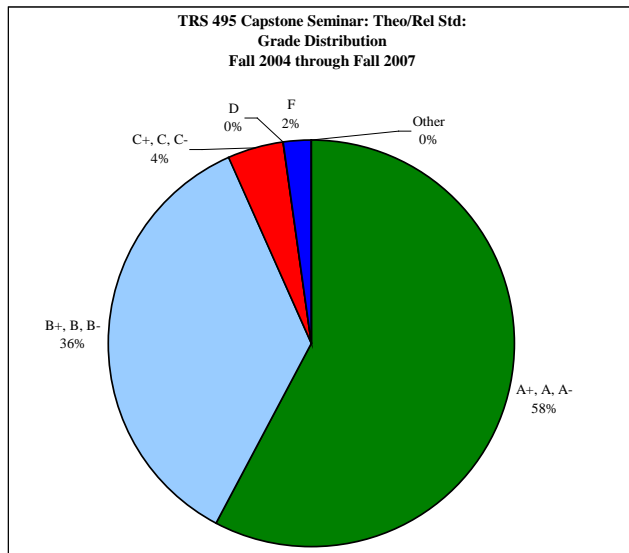
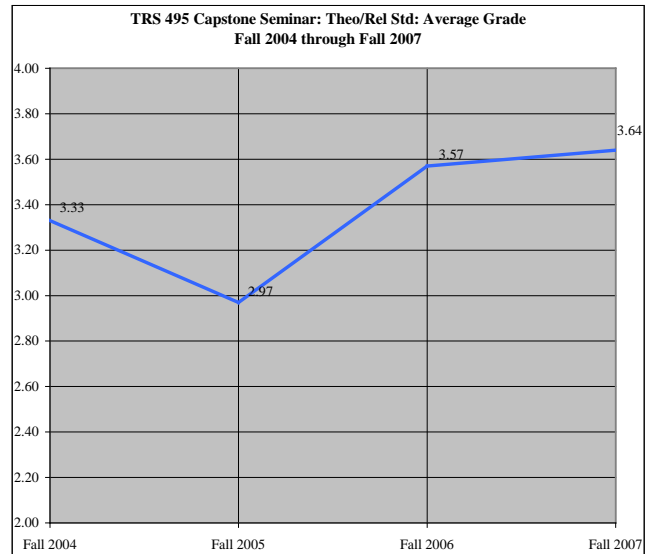
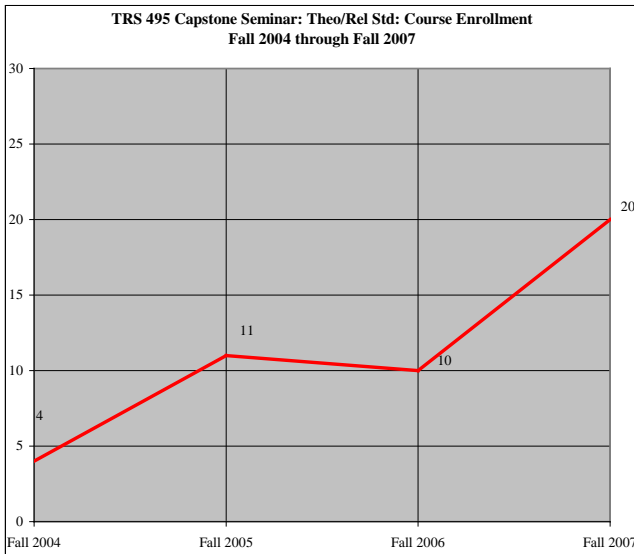
Attachment 1
THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA
Outcomes Assessment

SENIOR SEMINAR SUMMARY DATA: SCHOOL OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES
TRS 495 Capstone Seminar: Theo/Rel Std*

Term	Course Enrollment	Course Grade		Course Grades						Course Evaluation Results						
		Avg.	StDev.	A+, A, A-	B+, B, B-	C+, C, C-	D	F	Other**	Course Eval. #	Course Eval. %	Instructor Rating Avg.	Instructor Rating StDev.	Course Rating Avg.	Course Rating StDev.	
Fall 2004	4	3.33	0.29	1	3						5	125.00%	5.20	3.49	3.80	3.70
Fall 2005	11	2.97	1.12	4	5	1		1			9	81.82%	5.67	2.24	4.33	2.92
Fall 2006	10	3.57	0.51	7	2	1					4	40.00%	9.50	0.58	8.25	1.26
Fall 2007	20	3.64	0.38	14	6						18	90.00%	8.39	1.97	6.44	2.55

*In semesters where more than one section of the senior seminar or thesis option was offered, aggregate data is displayed.

**The "Other" category includes grades of I, W, AU, and P.



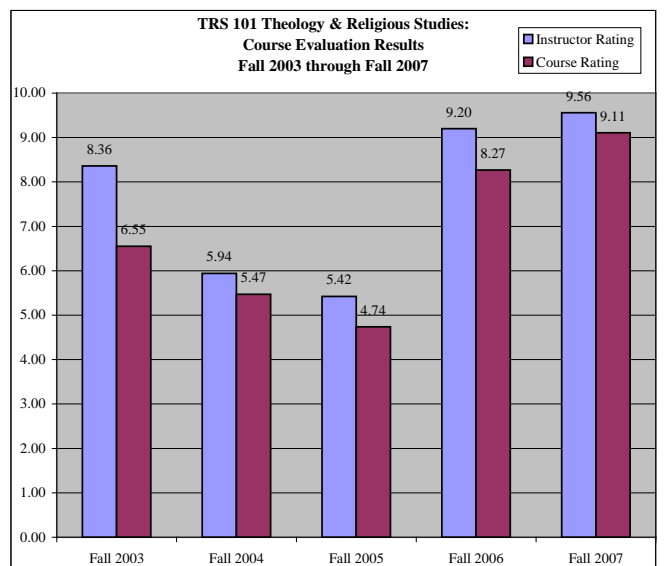
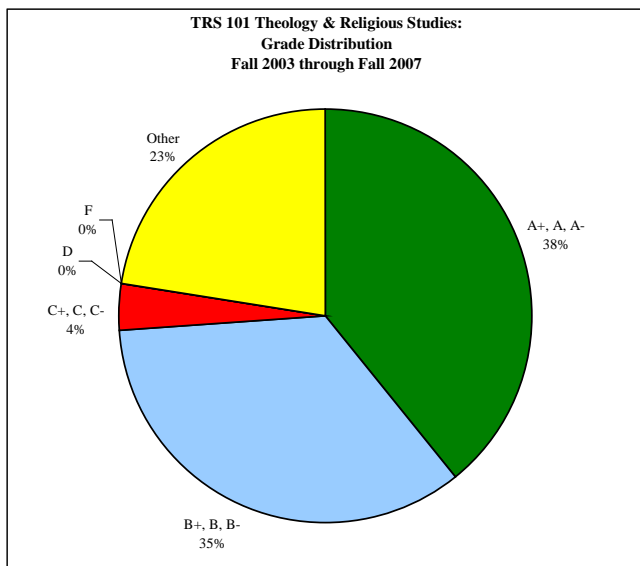
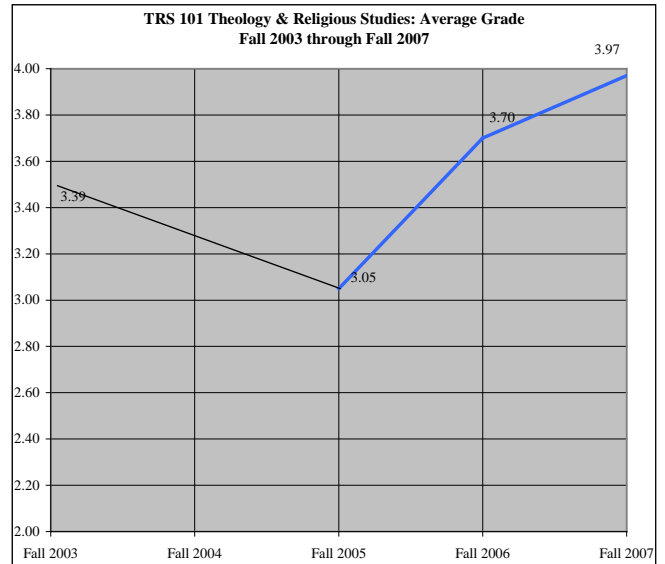
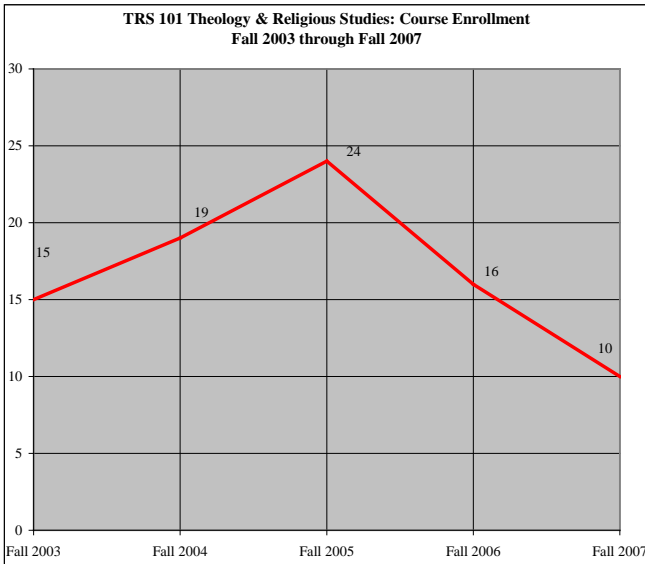
Attachment 2
THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA
Outcomes Assessment

SENIOR SEMINAR SUMMARY DATA: SCHOOL OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES
TRS 101 Theology & Religious Studies

Term	Course Enrollment	Course Grade		Course Grades						Course Evaluation Results					
		Avg.	StDev.	Grade Distribution						Course Eval.		Instructor Rating		Course Rating	
				A+, A, A-	B+, B, B-	C+, C, C-	D	F	Other**	#	%	Avg.	StDev.	Avg.	StDev.
Fall 2003	15	3.39	0.39	5	10					11	73.33%	8.36	1.36	6.55	2.34
Fall 2004	19								19	17	89.47%	5.94	2.59	5.47	2.18
Fall 2005	24	3.05	0.41	4	18	2				19	79.17%	5.42	2.55	4.74	2.42
Fall 2006	16	3.70	0.57	14	1	1				15	93.75%	9.20	1.21	8.27	1.58
Fall 2007	10	3.97	0.09	10						9	90.00%	9.56	0.53	9.11	1.17

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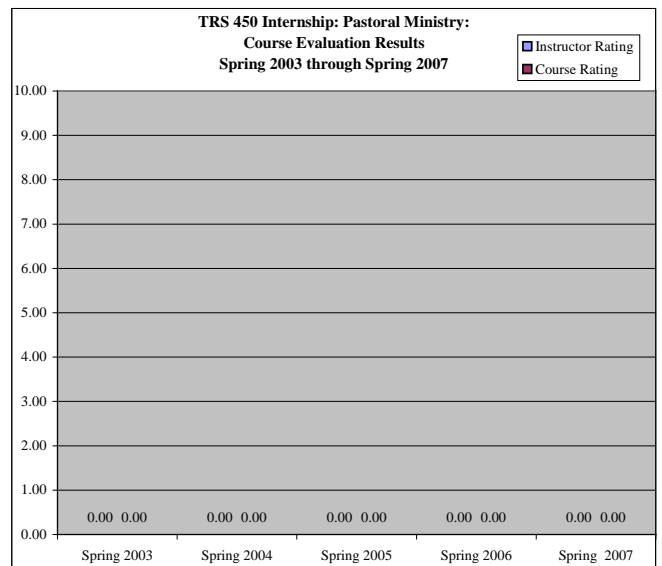
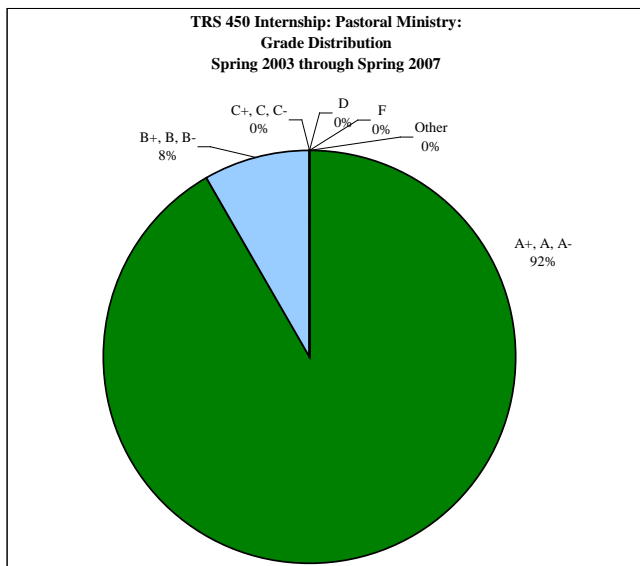
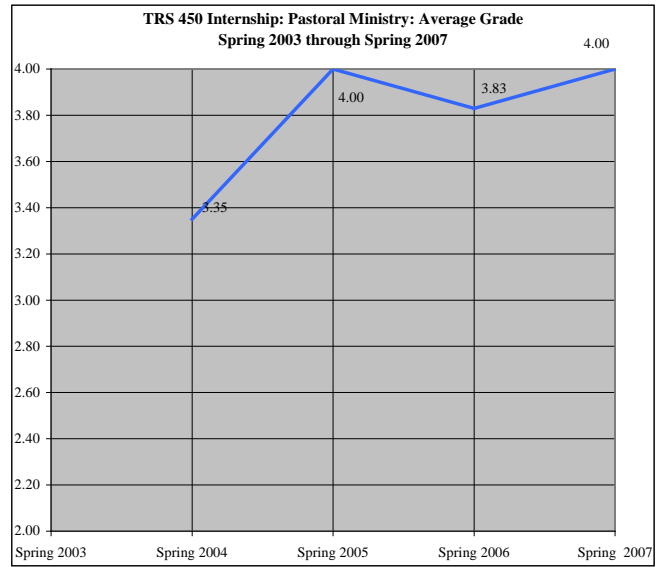
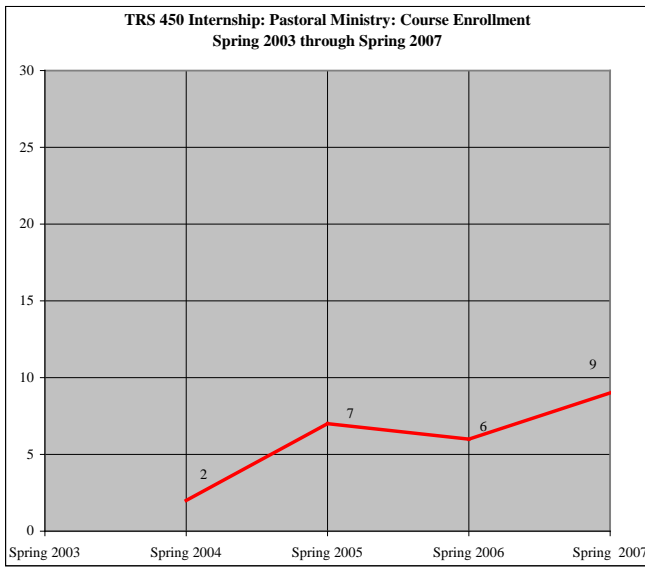
Attachment 3
THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA
Outcomes Assessment

SENIOR SEMINAR SUMMARY DATA: SCHOOL OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES
TRS 450 Internship: Pastoral Ministry

Term	Course Enrollment	Course Grade		Course Grades						Course Evaluation Results					
		Avg.	StDev.	A+, A, A-	B+, B, B-	C+, C, C-	D	F	Other**	Course Eval.		Instructor Rating		Course Rating	
										#	%	Avg.	StDev.	Avg.	StDev.
Spring 2003															
Spring 2004	2	3.35	0.92	1	1						0.00%				
Spring 2005	7	4.00	0.00	7							0.00%				
Spring 2006	6	3.83	0.41	5	1						0.00%				
Spring 2007	9	4.00	0.00	9											

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**The "Other" category includes grades of I, W, AU, and P.



Attachment 4
THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA
Outcomes Assessment

SENIOR SEMINAR SUMMARY DATA: SCHOOL OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES
TRS 453 Pastoral Ministry

Term	Course Enrollment	Course Grade		Course Grades Grade Distribution						Course Evaluation Results							
		Avg.	StDev.	A+, A, A-	B+, B, B-	C+, C, C-	D	F	Other**	Course Eval. #	Course Eval. %	Instructor Rating Avg.	Instructor Rating StDev.	Course Rating Avg.	Course Rating StDev.		
Spring 2005	15	3.49	0.79	11	2				1			8	53.33%	8.50	1.20	8.38	1.30
Spring 2006	8	3.45	0.40	3	5							5	62.50%	7.40	2.41	8.00	1.22

*In semesters where more than one section of the senior seminar or thesis option was offered, aggregate data is displayed.
**The "Other" category includes grades of I, W, AU, and P.

