Specific Courses being assessed:
   PHIL A405: History of Medieval Thought (Gossiaux)
   PHIL U270: Philosophy and Religion in the Middle Ages (Gossiaux)
   RELS A200: Early Christian Thought (Goodine)
   RELS U285: Heresies and Heretics (Goodine)
   RELS U386: The Medieval Synthesis (Janz) – syllabus unavailable

1. Does the syllabus demonstrate satisfactory focus on learning objectives (see Assessment Matrix)?

   C1 Yes.

   C2 Yes.

   C3 Yes.

PHIL-A405 and U270 clearly meet goals C1-3. They clearly focus on how medieval thinkers struggled with the relationship between faith and reason and assimilated the classical tradition to their Christian reality. While particular attention is paid to Aquinas, other medieval writers are studied, and their work is read in the context of the world in which these writers lived, especially that of the University of Paris in the thirteenth century. The role of broader context is rather less clearly visible in the major course (A405) than the Common Curriculum course (U270), but that is an appropriate distinction between the two types of courses.

RELS-A200 and U185 also meet these goals, though perhaps not quite as clearly or with as much strength. RELS-A200 focuses on late antiquity, ending in the fifth century, so it is arguably not medieval at all, but the ideas encountered in late antiquity continued to resonate in the middle ages, so it is an appropriate area of study for a medieval studies minor. RELS-U185, by focusing on so-called heresies, arguably pays less attention to central thinkers than seemingly marginal ones, but in so doing students are forced to consider what was considered central medieval thought, as well as important problems.

   E1 Yes. All courses for which material was submitted clearly meet this goal, requiring both papers and essay exams; indeed three of the four (excepting the Common Curriculum course RELS-U185) only use essay exams.
Dr. Gossiaux’s courses do not include presentations, which seems appropriate to his pedagogical approach. Dr. Goodine’s A200 course does include a presentation component.

This goal is not clearly met in PHIL-A405 and U270, nor in RELS-A200, though some mention is made of class discussion. A presentation is part of RELS-U185. Perhaps rather than modifying the course this goal should be modified, or at least not applied to these courses.

Dr. Gossiaux never intended to do in-class presentations. Not every course needs to include this component.

2. What is the weakest aspect of the thought courses? How should this be addressed?

The weakest aspect of Dr. Gossiaux’s courses is the failure to include a participation component in the grading scheme. While an oral presentation is necessary, students should not be able to warm the benches rather than participate and still receive an “A” in a course. Also, some evidence that students are being required to read secondary sources is desirable.

Perhaps a wider variety of philosophy courses would allow students to go beyond the high-medieval Parisian tradition that is the current focus—but this is by no means a flaw of those courses, since that tradition is clearly centrally important. To add more courses is beyond the capability of existing staff, so at this time it is fair to say there are no significant weaknesses in the philosophy offerings.

On the other hand, the religious studies courses currently offered tend to focus on late antiquity more than the middle ages per se. This is not a flaw of these courses, but, even more than for the philosophy courses, a reason to desire additional courses that more clearly deal with the medieval tradition, though it is impossible for additional courses to be offered by existing staff. As a side note, the fact that the person who taught these courses is leaving creates a real problem for the minor, since even these courses will likely be unavailable for the foreseeable future. The minor, as well as the Religious Studies Department in general, is seriously hurt by the lack of faculty specializing in the thousand-year period between Augustine and the sixteenth-century reformation.

The four courses under consideration minimally overlap with one another and in general offer a wonderfully comprehensive look at the richness and variety of medieval philosophical and theological thought. Currently, however, the only offering in post-Augustinian theology is the “Medieval Synthesis” course offered only twice and exclusively during summer sessions in the last four years. There is, therefore, virtually no regular coursework on medieval monastic theology, on the theology promulgated at the major medieval councils, on the spiritualities promoted by new religious orders like
the Franciscans, on medieval mysticism, etc. The situation will be bleaker in the future, since Dr. Goodine has left the University and no one has been brought on to cover her courses.

3. What is the strongest aspect of the thought courses? Why?

Primary sources – it is wonderful to see students being thrust into the thick of things with such in-depth readings of the primary source material. It should be noted that this is not at all easy, and it is good to see that Dr. Gossiaux is challenging his students. Given the comments from his students (who all RAVE about Dr. Gossiaux), they not only find themselves learning a great deal in his classes, but enjoying it immensely along the way.

Students in the philosophy courses deal directly and deeply with important texts that are at the heart of the development of the University of Paris, as well as the influx of classical materials that are often seen as part of the twelfth-century renaissance. This means that students encounter perhaps the most important moment in the development of medieval philosophy.

Students in the religious studies courses see both orthodox and heterodox approaches to faith in late antiquity and (at least in RELS-U185) the middle ages. This is rather unusual, since we tend to focus on the winners in doctrinal debates, but it is a truly positive feature because it allows students to trace how medieval thinkers operated, and how orthodox Christianity developed and was challenged.

Students appear to be engaging seriously with the technicalities of complex philosophical and theological arguments through close and careful readings of medieval texts. In all of these courses, they are also witnessing the development of philosophical and theological orthodoxies as the result of contests between thinkers and even traditions (the early Church’s engagement with Hellenistic thought, the universities’ grappling with Aristotelian thought introduced into the West through Muslim thinkers, etc.)

4. Are additional learning objectives being met in the thought courses?

It appears that most of the goals of A1-4 are at least to some extent also met in these courses. This is especially true in the philosophy courses, which seem clearly to meet goal A3 (because of the question of “Christian philosophy,” which touches on the interrelationships between reason and faith and by implication between sacred and secular) and goal A4 (because of the amount of time spent with primary texts).

5. Additional comments or concerns?

The philosophy courses seem to be strong and appropriately challenging. This is an important feature of the minor, and it seems to be being met well. The religious studies courses are also valuable as electives. The main weakness in this area is the fact that the Religious Studies Department is unable because of staffing difficulties to offer more courses that touch on medieval issues, and even the mostly late-antique courses that have
been so useful in the past are at risk now that the extraordinary faculty member who has
taught them is leaving. This gap severely impacts Medieval Studies minors, but it also
affects Religious Studies majors and other students. The Medieval Studies Steering
Committee strongly urges the Dean and Provost to work with the Religious Studies
Department to try to ameliorate this staffing gap as quickly as possible.