**History Department – Undergraduate Major Assessment Report**

**Learning Goals and Objectives**

Having completed a major in History, a student will be able to:

1. Gain appreciation for the depth and complexity of historical experience by understanding geographical breadth and the increasing interdependence of world cultures with their intellectual, cultural, religious, political, economic, and social diversities.

2. Gain appreciation for the depth and complexity of historical experience by acquiring substantial historical knowledge in the chronological context of pre-modern, modern and contemporary history.

3. Understand historical arguments and assess them critically by evaluating conflicts of interpretation, examining evidence, and analyzing how explanations are constructed in historical writing.

4. Read and examine primary sources critically. Expectation is that History majors will be able to define a historical problem, identify relevant related primary sources, and develop a research strategy to explore the historical problem.

5. Synthesize information from a variety of sources, construct cogent arguments, and communicate them in clear, convincing prose.

**Assessment Methods**

In accordance with the History Assessment Plan of AY 2017/18 the department conducted an extensive departmental consultation process that included student and faculty surveys and a faculty retreat focusing entirely on the evaluation of strengths and weaknesses of History majors as well as methods to improve the envisioned departmental learning outcomes before graduation were considered at length.   
  
The most significant weakness faculty observed even among advanced students’ work was deficiency in the skills of deep reading of primary sources, examining layers of meaning transmitted in various kinds of historical materials, and analyzing the construction of interpretation in historical writing.   
  
The necessity for an enhancement of the curriculum became increasingly evident during HIST 407 capstone research seminars. Producing the research paper in this required seminar is at the same time ambitious and challenging for the student, because the result is intended to demonstrate their level of professional advancement.   
  
Deviating from the desired goal majors often showed a lack of the research skills described above, since they tend to delay the capstone seminar until their very last term before graduation, hoping to concentrate on this capstone seminar after having completed all other requirements.

**Decisions and Action Plan**

To strengthen the majors’ analytical skills in contextualizing historical sources, to further their intellectual engagement with historical arguments, and to practice the clear and cogent presentation of their evaluation in writing throughout their course of studying History and in preparation of the capstone seminar, the following strategy was devised:

With the assistance of the undergraduate curriculum committee the department developed a course titled ‘The Historian’s Craft’, which in the future will be offered every term as HIST 290 and will be mandatory for declared History majors before they can apply to take the HIST 407 capstone seminar. ‘The Historian’s Craft’ will train the skills described above and will be completed with an original research paper produced taking a step-by-step structured approach in close consultation with the respective instructor.

In the AY 2017/18, one History faculty member taught the course HIST 290 as an experimental course (HIST 399). The introduction of the course showed two significant positive results:  
  
1. Feedback from participating students shows that the systematic training of the described professional skills offered early in their course of studies is highly appreciated.

2. Feedback from faculty encountering students in capstone seminars who completed the new course shows that the students are able to apply their acquired skills efficiently and build on their previous training when completing their more demanding capstone research paper.

**Recommendation**

With the envisioned target met effectively during the trial period the new course has been sent to the university level approval process for departmental curriculum changes.

In the coming academic years we will continue to monitor and document the effectiveness of HIST 290 through queries assessing student and faculty experience regarding learning outcomes in HIST 290 as well as in 300- and 400-level courses that require an analytical research paper. Incoming instructors of HIST 290 will refine existing course content modules and/or develop new modules as deemed necessary in conjunction with the undergraduate curriculum committee. The process will be documented and reported in the next assessment report.