

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). In AY 2018/2019, the course one History faculty member taught the course as an experimental course, followed by three faculty members teaching it as an approved course, HIST 290, in AY 2019/2020. To date, the introduction of the course showed the following 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 and build on their previous training when completing their more demanding capstone research paper. Students' ability to apply these acquired skills may also be somewhat uneven however faculty continue to evaluate the students' demonstrations of these skills and use this information as a point off of which to build the students' capacities outlined at the beginning of this document.

Recommendation

With the envisioned target met effectively during the trial period, and the new course being approved and assigned a permanent number, a submission to incorporate HIST 290 as a required course in our major is in the process of being sent for the university level approval 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.