

Assessment of the History Major, 2012-13

Our assessment of the major in 2012-13 focused on student learning outcomes in three areas: research, writing, and ability to articulate the skills learned in the history major and their relevance to a variety of career paths. We also sought to answer three additional questions. How useful are the Historian's Craft courses in preparing students for the HIST 600 research seminar? How do undergraduates choose courses and decide whether to major in History? How would students like to see History courses and the History major changed or improved?

Summary of Findings:

Question 1: How well do students use appropriate research procedures and aids to identify the range and limitations of primary and secondary sources available to engage a historical problem?

Our information suggests that most history majors (above 50%) continue to learn how to *analyze* primary sources, but not necessarily how to use appropriate research procedures to *find* either primary or secondary sources. Over the past year, there may have been some slight increase in student comfort conducting historical research; at the same time, however, students completing HIST 600 seem to feel that they have learned slightly *less* about how to access sources in the library and on the internet than did students in fall 2011.

Question 2: How well do students present original and coherent findings through clearly written, persuasive arguments and narratives?

Our information suggests that most graduating history majors (60-80%) are able to write clear prose and persuasive arguments that demonstrate original thinking. Students consistently feel more confident in their ability to make written arguments than in presenting their original research findings in writing, although the gap seems to be growing smaller.

Question 3: How well can students identify the skills developed in the history major and articulate the applicability of these skills to a variety of endeavors and career paths beyond the professional practice of history?

This year, as last year, history majors in our focus groups listed writing, research, and analytical skills as skills that they obtained in the History major, and were able to clearly articulate how such skills could translate to job skills. This year, however, students also mentioned gaining strong interpersonal and conversation skills. Again this year, three of the six lowest scores on the senior exit questionnaire related

to skills and careers. However, the responses in 2012 were markedly higher than in 2011, suggesting that the undergraduate program's increased efforts in career advising may be starting to pay off.

Question 4: How useful are the Historian's Craft courses in preparing students for the HIST 600 research seminar?

The results this year bear out the promise and importance of the Historian's Craft courses that was hinted at in last year's assessment. The online surveys attest that the Historian's Craft courses were very effective in teaching students research skills in preparation for the HIST 600 research seminar. Comments in students' exit surveys (filled out upon completion of the HIST 600 seminar) strongly emphasize students' desire for such a research-oriented course early in their history curriculum.

Question 5: How do undergraduates choose courses and decide whether to major in History?

Choosing courses: Most history majors choose their courses by finding favorite professors and "following" them. Non-majors reported choosing courses based on their fulfillment of general degree requirements. Almost all students cited ratemyprofessor.com as an important resource for getting information about professors.

Choosing the History major: Most majors reported selecting the History majors because of a general interest in History (often fostered in childhood or high school) or because the program dovetailed well with other majors. Most majors in the focus group were also majoring in another field because they thought that other major would make them more marketable; they also said that they identified more with the other major than with History. Non-major students said that being unsure about what someone "could do" with a degree in history was at least one reason why they did not consider becoming a History major.

Question 6: How would students like to see History courses and the History major changed or improved?

By far the most-frequently mentioned improvement to the history major (41% of all recorded responses to this question) was for the department to offer more courses that would require students to do research before the HIST 600 seminar – not just a specific course (such as the Historian's Craft) that would provide explicit training, but practice in doing smaller research projects throughout all levels of history courses, from the 100-level up. Multiple students also requested courses that either address the "relationship between historical events and current events" or address "current, more recent history topics"; courses that require students to debate in class; and more seminars outside of HIST 600. History majors also expressed a desire for a stronger sense of department community, especially opportunities outside of the classroom to connect with faculty and other History majors.

Information on Measurements:

Senior Exit Questionnaire

Fall 2011: 75 responses out of 130 students in HIST 600 = 58% response rate

Spring 2012: 85 responses out of 193 students in HIST 600 = 44.0% response rate

Fall 2012: 66 responses out of 139 students in HIST 600 = 47.5% response rate

Fall 2011: 97% were history majors; 87% seniors; 13% juniors

Spring 2012: 96% were history majors; 78% seniors; 21% juniors

Fall 2012: 98% were history majors; 91% seniors; 9% juniors

HIST 600 Rubrics

Fall 2011: 30 of 130 HIST 600 seminar papers were graded on the rubric = 23%

Spring 2012: 30 of 193 HIST 600 seminar papers were graded on the rubric = 16%

Fall 2012: 24 of 139 HIST 600 seminar papers were graded on the rubric = 17%

Online Surveys

HIST 200/201 (Historian's Craft)

Fall 2012 Pre-Test: 63 responses out of 101 enrolled = 62.4%

Fall 2012 Post-Test: 32 responses out of 73 enrolled = 43.8%

Spring 2013 Pre-Test: 55 responses out of 84 enrolled = 65.5%

HIST 600 (capstone research seminar)

Fall 2012 Pre-Test: 89 responses out of 147 enrolled = 60.5%

Fall 2012 Post-Test: 51 responses out of 141 enrolled = 36.2%

Spring 2013 Pre-Test: 87 responses out of 157 enrolled = 55.4%

Focus Groups

Spring 2012 – 19 students, all history majors

Spring 2013 – 12 students: 9 history majors, 3 undeclared

Baseline Measurements of and Targets for Student Learning Outcomes – For Report to MIU

Measurement	Baseline – Fall 2011 (95% C.I.)	Spring 2012 (95% C.I.)	Fall 2012 – Semester start (95% C.I.)	Fall 2012 – Semester end (95% C.I.)	Target by Fall 2016
Research:					
Exit: comfort id'ing range, limitation of sources (on scale from 1 to 4)	3.19 3.03 – 3.35	3.32 3.20 – 3.44		3.45 3.32 – 3.58	3.35
Capstone papers: mean # of proficient research areas (out of 4)	2.7 2.21 – 3.19	3.1 2.49 – 3.62		3.08 2.51 – 3.65	3.2
Capstone papers: % proficient in all 4 research areas	50% 34% – 66%	63% 47% – 79%		54% 34% – 74%	60%
Online survey: Analyze a historical document (% answering Q5 correctly)	(pre-test) 65% 54.2–75.8%	(pre-test) 68% 58.8 – 77.2%	(pre-test) 71% 61.6 – 80.4%	(post-test) 78% 66.6 – 89.4%	(post-test) 74%
Online survey: Find sources from citations (% answering both Q11 and Q12 correctly)	(pre-test) 34% 23.3 – 44.7%	(pre-test) 44% 34.2 – 53.8%	(pre-test) 48% 37.6 – 58.4%	(post-test) 51% 37.3 – 64.7%	(post-test) 50%
Online survey: Comfort locating sources from a particular time (answers to Q9 on scale of 1 to 5)	(pre-test) 3.61 3.4 – 3.8	(pre-test) 2.40 2.2 – 2.6	(pre-test) 3.66 3.5–3.8	(post-test) 4.21 4.0–4.4	(post-test) 4.0
Writing:					
Capstone papers: mean # of proficient writing areas (out of 4)	3.0 2.6 – 3.4	2.97 2.46 – 3.48		3.0 2.37 – 3.56	3.4
Capstone papers: % proficient in all 4 writing areas	63% 48% -- 78%	56% 40% -- 72%		54% 34% -- 74%	70%
Exit: courses develop written arguments (on a scale from 1 to 4)	3.53 3.39 – 3.67	3.61 3.49 – 3.73		3.62 3.47 – 3.77	3.6
Exit: comfort presenting findings in writing (on a scale from 1 to 4)	3.17 2.98 – 3.36	3.29 3.14 – 3.44		3.42 3.26 – 3.58	3.4

Unless labeled “pre-test,” all measurements are of students completing HIST 600, the capstone research seminar for the major. “Pre-test” measurements are of students entering HIST 600.

L&S ASSESSMENT REPORT SURVEY 2012-2013

This survey may be completed online, by going to:
https://uwmadison.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_1KPP5NTbU2acZ6t

Introduction

Dear L&S chairs, directors, faculty, and academic program staff:

Annual assessment reports are due to the college by May 15, 2013.

By completing the survey that follows, you will be submitting your annual report on the assessment of student learning. These reports are needed so UW-Madison can comply with Regent and Federal regulations that require the university to systematically perform this work for all academic programs that lead to a credential (degree, major, and certificate). Your responses will be used to create the L&S Annual Report to the Provost on the Assessment of Student Learning. The college report to the Provost must contain a response for every L&S credential. As you know, this is a huge task - your help is essential.

The following links offer some background on Assessment of Student Learning, from the college assessment plan to some simple "how to" guides. (Some of the survey questions below also provide links to relevant resources.)

- L&S Assessment Plan: <https://kb.wisc.edu/lis/page.php?id=25259>
- L&S Department and Program Plans and Reports: <https://kb.wisc.edu/lis/page.php?id=23837>
- L&S Plan and Report content guidelines / templates: <https://kb.wisc.edu/lis/page.php?id=25242>
- Assessment Tips and Terms: <https://kb.wisc.edu/lis/page.php?id=25287>

This is the first time we are trying to gather this information by asking you to complete an online survey. Because reports are due May 15, 2013, the survey will be open during the Spring 2013 term. This survey has been designed to allow you to start, stop, and revise responses as long as you do so on the same computer where you started the survey, using the original link you were sent to begin the survey, and if you click "next" (which saves your information) before closing the survey. (If this gives you trouble, contact Elaine.) As an alternative to responding online, we will also make the survey available as an MS Word document that can be emailed to us.

If your program provides a formal report on assessment to a professional organization, accrediting agency, board of visitors, or other group, you may share that report as part of your response. Please contact Elaine Klein, the L&S Assistant Dean for Academic Planning (emklein@ls.wisc.edu) to discuss these options. (We will need responses for any programs that are not covered by these reports.)

Finally, we hope to share and use this information across the college, to encourage departments and programs to learn from each other, develop collaborations, and improve practices and learning. You may also notice that the information you provide here will be requested by other entities - the L&S Academic Planning Council, Curriculum Committee, and other groups in the college refer to assessment activities when discussing program reviews, requests for changes to courses and curricula, requests for departmental reconfiguration, calls for proposals for new projects, etc. Understanding how, and how well, our students are performing in our programs is essential to the work we do. The responses you provide will help us know if we're headed in the right direction.

Again, thank you for your response.

Gary Sandefur, Dean, College of Letters & Science
Elaine M. Klein, Assistant Dean for Academic Planning

Contact Information

Q2.1. If we have questions about the responses provided, it would be useful to be able to discuss them with you. Whom should we contact?

Sarah Thal, Director of Undergraduate Studies

Q2.2. Address

Box 4026, Humanities

Q2.3. e-mail contact

thal@wisc.edu

Q2.4. Telephone

265-6033

Program Information Validation

Q3.1. List all of the academic programs this response addresses. Remember to include undergraduate and graduate levels, as well as certificate programs. For your convenience, we provide here links to the lists of approved UW-Madison programs.

- Majors, options and degrees: http://registrar.wisc.edu/documents/85_Majors_Options_Degrees.pdf
- Certificates: http://registrar.wisc.edu/documents/85_Official_Certificates.pdf

This documents addresses the Bachelor of Arts in History and the Bachelor of Science in History. Steve Kantrowitz, our Director of Graduate Studies, will submit the materials related to the graduate program separately.

Q3.2. Are the names and levels of the programs, as you understand them, consistent with the official lists?

- Yes
- No
- Academic program not listed
- Academic program should not be listed

Q3.3. If an academic program name needs to be updated, you may need to request a change to make the working name consistent with the official name. This will require approval by the department/program, the L&S Academic Planning Council, and the University Academic Planning Council. If you think you would like to change an academic program name, please contact your associate dean and the Assistant Dean for Academic Planning, Elaine M. Klein (emklein@ls.wisc.edu).

- Information on changing program names: <https://kb.wisc.edu/ls/page.php?id=20052>

Should we let Elaine know you'll be contacting her about this?

- Yes
- No

Q3.4. If an academic program isn't listed, and if it should be formally recognized by the university, the department/program needs to seek approval through the College and University Academic Planning Councils. Please alert your department chair and associate dean that you wish to begin this process. If you have questions, contact the L&S Assistant Dean for Academic Planning, Elaine Klein (emklein@ls.wisc.edu).

- For Information on creating new academic programs: <https://kb.wisc.edu/ls/page.php?id=20049>

Should we let Elaine know you'll be contacting her about this?

- Yes
- No

Q3.5. If you have an academic program that should not be listed in these official documents (because the faculty have closed or suspended it), that action must be formally approved and implemented by the university. The department/program needs to seek approval through the L&S and University Academic Planning Councils.

Please alert your department chair and associate dean as soon as possible that you wish to begin this process. If you have questions, contact the L&S Assistant Dean for Academic Planning, Elaine Klein (emklein@ls.wisc.edu).

- For Information on suspending or discontinuing academic programs: <https://kb.wisc.edu/ls/page.php?id=23316>

Should we let Elaine know you'll be contacting her about this?

- Yes
- No

Assessment Plan

Q4.1. Please review the assessment plan on file for your program(s).

- L&S Department and Program Assessment Plans: <https://kb.wisc.edu/ls/page.php?id=23837>

Is it current?

- Yes
- No

Q4.2. If the plan on file is not current, and if you have a current plan, please send a copy to Elaine Klein (emklein@ls.wisc.edu). [Sent on April 5th, 2013]

If the plan on file is not current, and you need to update your plan, please provide a statement below explaining your plans to undertake that work. Your updated plan should be sent to the Dean (c/o Elaine Klein) by June 30, 2013. (Please contact Elaine if you need to discuss an alternative deadline.)

You may find the following documents useful as you undertake this work:

- L&S Plan and Report content guidelines / templates: <https://kb.wisc.edu/ls/page.php?id=25242>
- Assessment Tips and Terms: <https://kb.wisc.edu/ls/page.php?id=25287>
- L&S Department and Program Plans and Reports: <https://kb.wisc.edu/ls/page.php?id=23837>
- L&S Assessment Plan: <https://kb.wisc.edu/ls/page.php?id=25259>

Q4.3. Do you have other programs on which you can provide an assessment report? (Please understand that we must provide some report on every academic program and credential we offer.)

- Yes
- Nope, I'm done here.

Recent Assessment Activity

Q5.1. Assessment Purpose. Please describe the purpose of the assessment activity (e.g., to conduct a curricular or program review, to assess learning across a sequence of courses, to solve a problem with student performance, to honor MIU or other obligations, etc.)

- address student, alumni, and faculty concerns about the degree to which, and when, students learn how to research in the major
- address student and alumni concerns that students do not understand the connection between a history degree and potential careers
- improve the major more generally
- assess student learning outcomes for the MIU

Q5.2. Learning Outcomes or Goals Assessed. Referring to the list of student learning objectives/goals expressed in the program assessment plan, please identify the learning outcome(s) that were the focus of the assessment activity: what did you study about what you want students to know, value and/or do?

During the three years of 2011-14, the History Department is assessing progress in students' ability to:

- 1) Use appropriate research procedures and aids to identify the range and limitations of primary and secondary sources available to engage a historical problem;
- 2) Present original and coherent findings through clearly written, persuasive arguments and narratives; and
- 3) Explain what the history major has taught them to do and how those skills apply to a variety of careers.

Q5.3. Assessment Strategy. Please describe your most recent assessment project. What did you do to try to better understand student learning across this program, in the context of the learning goal discussed in your response above? Feel free to describe the tools, strategies, methods, and analysis used (e.g., graduating student surveys, standardized tests, grades on embedded questions on exams, alumni surveys, focus groups or interviews, evaluation of student work on papers, portfolios, capstone assignments, etc.)

A. Online Test

- Direct assessment of Goal 1 (research skills)
- Direct assessment of effectiveness of the new "Historian's Craft" intermediate-level research courses in preparing students for the capstone research seminar (since the test is administered before and after the "Historian's Craft" as well as before and after the HIST 600 capstone research seminar)

B. Common Rubric to Assess Final 600 Seminar Papers (partial)

- Direct assessment of Goals 1 and 2 (research and writing)

C. Senior Exit Survey

- Indirect assessment of Goals 1, 2, and 3 (asking students how comfortable or competent they feel with research, writing, and articulating connections between skills, careers, and other endeavors)
- Student views of the major, of courses, and of advising services, with suggestions for improvement

D. Focus Groups

- Direct assessment of Goal 3 (ability to articulate skills and their applicability)
- Subjective evaluation of Goals 1, 2, and 3 (asking students how comfortable or competent they feel with research, writing, and articulating connections between skills, careers, and other endeavors)
- Suggestions for improvement of the major and career connection advising

Q5.4. Key Findings and Impact. Please summarize the key findings (evidence/results) and how the department or program plans to use this information (e.g., no curricular changes, program enhancements, program redesign, etc.). This may include to whom results were reported to effect change (if needed), whether the results suggested other areas of inquiry, plans for continued attention to assessment (including "tweaking" the assessment plan), and/or deadlines for achieving milestones related to the above activities.

Each April, our Undergraduate Council reviews the year's assessment activities and, based on that assessment report, makes recommendations to the department for changes.

Based on our 2011 assessments, we changed the requirements of the History major and continued to expand career advising offerings:

1. While two-thirds of history majors measured proficient in research after completion of the capstone seminar, only about half of majors were proficient before taking that seminar. This meant that the capstone seminar often served as more of an introduction to research than a capstone research experience.

→ In fall 2012, the History department revised the requirements of the major to require that students take the new, Comm-B Historian's Craft course – an intermediate-level research course – before taking the HIST 600 capstone seminar. This change (and others) will be in effect for students who declare the major from September 1, 2013.

2. The great majority of graduating majors (77%) could write proficiently and feel comfortable writing.

→ No change needed at this time.

3. Students could identify general skills they learned in the history major, but could not so easily relate them to particular careers or work-related activities. Three of the six lowest scores on the senior exit questionnaire related to skills and careers.

→ Continue to offer and promote career-related workshops, roundtables, etc. The career advisor also began writing a career blog and sending weekly career e-mails to all history majors.

The focus groups and senior exit surveys also provided additional feedback – especially student interest in some kind of recognition of their increased global expertise, and student perceptions that the field concentration was not successful. These responses also helped shape the revised requirements of the major.

Based on our 2012 assessments, the Undergraduate Council urged department faculty to support the recent and upcoming changes by including more research assignments in courses at all levels and inviting the career advisor to visit their classes:

1. Student learning outcomes related to research remained unchanged from 2011. (New curricular requirements come into effect in fall 2013. We expect to see results of those changes among 2015 and 2016 graduating seniors.)

2. Again, the majority of graduating majors (60-80%, depending on the particular measurement) are able to write clear prose and persuasive arguments that demonstrate original thinking. Students consistently feel more confident in their ability to make written arguments than in presenting their original research findings in writing, although the gap seems to be growing smaller.

3. Students could identify more skills they learned in the history major this year than last year. Students this year, as opposed to last year, were also more able to relate those skills to particular careers or work-related activities. Unchanged from last year: three of the six lowest scores on the senior exit questionnaire related to skills and careers. However, the responses in 2012 were markedly higher than in 2011, suggesting that the undergraduate program's increased efforts in career advising may be starting to pay off.

The Future

Q6.1. Please let us know what your next steps for assessing student learning will be.

We will continue these same activities for one more year, then review the assessment plan in 2014.

Thank you!

Please email this document to emklein@ls.wisc.edu.

If you prefer, hard copies may be sent to Elaine Klein, Rm 307D South Hall

We'll be in touch if we have any additional questions.

Changes to the History Major Requirements, to go into effect for students declaring the major from September 1, 2013:

1. Add a requirement that students take HIST 201 The Historian's Craft (an intermediate-level, Comm-B research course) before their capstone research seminar (HIST 600).
2. Increase and redefine geographical breadth requirements. Instead of 3 courses (1 in US, 1 in Europe, and 1 in Non-West/Third World), students will take courses in 4 of 8 breadth areas (United States, Europe, Africa, Central or East Asia, South or Southeast Asia, Latin America, Middle East, and Transnational).
3. Discontinue the existing, 4-course concentration requirement (established in 2005), which has not fulfilled its expected purpose.
4. Create a new Global Track in the major. Students choosing this option will fulfill all of the requirements for a History major, as well as one additional geographical breadth course (which must include a Transnational course) and a foreign language or foreign experience requirement.
5. Establish a Distinction in the Major, to recognize excellent academic work by students who do not pursue Honors and write an honors thesis.