

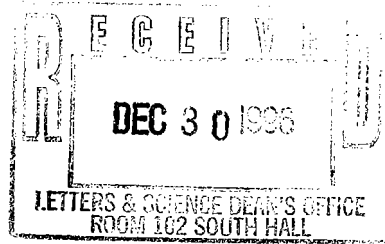
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
College of Letters and Science

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

3211 Humanities Building
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30 December 1996

Dean Phillip Certain,
College of Letters and Science,
102 South Hall, Campus.

Dear Dean Certain:

Please find enclosed the History Department's assessment plan for undergraduate majors. In mid-December, the department faculty unanimously endorsed a draft version of this plan as submitted by me on behalf of the Undergraduate Council. As you will see, we wish to experiment with three modes of gathering qualitative evidence regarding undergraduate outcomes in the History major; we wished to allow ourselves the maximum flexibility in arriving at an efficacious gauge. I hope you will also notice that we hewed to the requirements stipulated by the Regents, the North Central Association and the College. Should you have any questions about the attached plan, please do not hesitate to contact me via one of the many media at our disposal—telephone, letter or email. I look forward to embarking on this experiment.

Sincerely,

David McDonald,
Associate Chair,
Chair, Undergraduate Council,
Department of History.

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**ASSESSMENT PLAN FOR UNDERGRADUATE MAJORS IN THE
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
DECEMBER 1996**

Introduction:

The following document sets forth a plan to measure and evaluate student outcomes among undergraduate majors in the Department of History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. This plan seeks to fulfill twin mandates on outcome-based assessment, announced by the College of Letters and Science in the autumn of 1994. These mandates emanated from the University of Wisconsin's Board of Regents and the University's major accrediting agency, the North Central Association. The History Department's assessment plan emerged from a two-stage process. The Department's Undergraduate Council [UGC] drafted a preliminary plan, to complement a parallel plan for the assessment of graduate education compiled by its sister committee, the Graduate Council. In developing this draft, the Undergraduate Council was guided by four criteria stipulated by the College of Letters and Science:

1. The necessity to articulate a clear and concrete set of goals and objectives for undergraduate majors in History.
2. The necessity to identify and develop instruments and methods for assessing students' progress to and achievement of these goals and objectives.
3. The need to design procedures that will allow the Department to use the results from assessment to improve and/or refine the major, and
4. The necessity to establish a feasible timetable for implementing the second and third steps of our plan.

In addition, the plan reflects the experience of pilot projects carried out by several departments in Letters and Science during 1995. These departments had volunteered to conduct preliminary assessment exercises for the benefit of their colleagues elsewhere in the College. History's plan has sought to build on the evaluations of these exercises with a view to maximizing evaluative effectiveness while attempting to minimize the administrative impact on faculty and staff, recognizing that too great a burden might vitiate a valuable tool for assessing the department's performance of its mission.

The UGC's draft plan was circulated to all members of the department for discussion at a meeting on 18 December 1996. After several members suggested minor revisions, the department unanimously endorsed the UGC's proposal.

A. Educational Goals and Objectives:

The challenges of elaborating useful objectives for the training of History undergraduate majors are patent in a perusal of the Department's mission statement. This statement notes the size and diversity of our undergraduate population—majors number approximately 450 on the average—and the imposing breadth of periods and fields offered, spanning human activity from 2,500 BCE until the present on all continents except Australia and Antarctica, and requiring the use of an equally broad variety of analytic techniques, methods and theories. This breadth also finds reflection in the large number of FTE's in our Department. All members feel strongly that meaningful goals and objectives ought to provide useful measures for gauging the intellectual growth of our undergraduates, while taking due account of the diversity of learning experiences—including course contents, materials and teaching methods—that we hold to constitute the department's traditional strength. In recognition of these *desiderata*, department members agree that the history major requires the integration of two sorts of intellectual acquisition. The first sort concerns the knowledge base we can reasonably assume our graduating majors to have developed during their undergraduate career; the second involves the cognitive abilities, the analytic techniques and the expository skills we expect them to develop in their study of history.

I. Knowledge-based goals:

1. A general knowledge of world history since before 1500 C. E., in addition to a more specific knowledge of the history of a period, area or field systematically developed in courses taken in the major.
2. A general knowledge of historical methods, theory and debates relating to their area of concentration.

II. Ability-oriented goals.

1. The ability to define historical problems and to identify the resources necessary to explore them.
2. The ability to conduct basic historical research, involving critical assessment of a variety of evidentiary sources.
3. The ability to apply appropriate methods and theories in discussion of historical events.

4. The ability to construct organized and substantiated oral and written arguments dealing with historical questions.

B. Means of Assessment:

In order meaningfully to assess the department's success in promoting its majors' achievements of these goals, two sorts of instruments recommend themselves for the quality of the information they provide, in addition to the relative convenience of their implementation.

1. Student portfolios: These portfolios are files that will store samples of given majors' written work throughout their career at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Three varying forms of selection will be tested, in order to determine the most effective. Each has been suggested by collegial discussion and by examples drawn from other universities in the United States that have undertaken outcome-based assessment of their undergraduate programs. First, our Undergraduate Advisor might identify volunteers from those students declaring their intention to pursue a major in History. In return for a guarantee of their anonymity, these students would be asked to deposit with the Undergraduate Advisor copies of major papers written for their courses in History, culminating in their capstone paper. Alternatively, portfolios might be compiled from those students who have taken their "Bascom" courses in the History Department and gone on to major in History. In either case, the portfolio would provide a clear, substantial and demonstrable indication of students' progress toward the educational goals identified above. Finally, the UGC might collect senior theses from designated senior seminars, a prerequisite for the History major; the economies of storage space and time make this an attractive alternative.
2. Brief survey: To supplement the impressionistic evidence gathered from the materials compiled in student portfolios, the Department will also administer a brief (maximum two pages) questionnaire to graduated majors, to be distributed no less than one year after their date of graduation. The sample will be drawn from the same lists already being used for purposes of "development." The questionnaire will seek outcome-oriented information, including whether or not the student has entered post-graduate study (in History or other disciplines), whether the student has taken employment in a history-related field and whether the History major prepared them for her/his present pursuits. The questionnaire would end on an open-ended question inviting reflections on the student's experience as a history major.

C. Feedback:

In partnership with the Undergraduate Advisor, the Undergraduate Council will conduct annual assessments, using the instruments stipulated above. A sub-committee of the UGC—comprised of two faculty members, the Undergraduate Advisor and an undergraduate representative of student history organizations—will each year compile an annual report on the achievement of the department's educational goals, based on their assessment of the information yielded by the assessment procedure. They will present this report first to the Undergraduate Council, which will draft recommendations for measures to facilitate the achievement of the prevailing educational goals, revisions to those goals themselves or to the assessment instruments. Subsequently, the Joint Committee on Teaching will discuss this report and recommendations before presenting it and final recommendations to the Department.

D. Timetable:

The Department will begin implementation of this plan in two stages. We shall initiate the compilation of portfolios in the spring semester of 1997, at which time the Undergraduate Council will also discuss the formulation of the survey, to be initiated in the fall semester of the same year. On the recommendation of the UGC, a decision will be taken after three years as to the most effective means for the compilation of student portfolios.

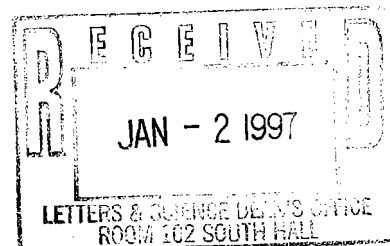
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December 27, 1996

Dean Phillip Certain
102 South Hall
Campus Mail



Dear Phil:

Attached you will find a copy of the preliminary assessment plan which the History Department has approved for the evaluation of its undergraduate program. Last week you received the plan for our graduate program. Let me take this opportunity to wish you a very healthy and extremely productive New Year!

With warmest regards,

Jim Donnelly
Chair and Professor of History

Attachment

History: Undergraduate Program
Preliminary Assessment Plan

A. Educational Goals:

The history major requires the integration of two sorts of skills. The first sort concerns the knowledge base which we can reasonably expect of our graduating majors; the second involves the cognitive abilities, the analytic techniques, and the expository skills which we expect them to develop in their study of history.

I. Knowledge-based goals:

1. A general knowledge of world history before 1500 C. E., in addition to a more specific knowledge of the history of a period, area, or field systematically developed in courses taken in the major.
2. A general knowledge of historical methods, theory, and debates relating to their area of concentration.

II. Ability-oriented goals.

1. The ability to define historical problems and to identify the resources necessary to explore them.
2. The ability to conduct basic historical research involving critical assessment of a variety of evidentiary sources.
3. The ability to apply appropriate methods and theories in the discussion of historical events.
4. The ability to construct organized and substantiated oral and written arguments dealing with historical questions.

B. Means of Assessment:

In order meaningfully to assess the department's success in promoting its majors' achievements of these goals, two sorts of instruments recommend themselves for the quality of the information they provide, in addition to the relative convenience of their implementation.

1. Student portfolios: These portfolios are files that will store samples of given majors' written work throughout their careers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Two forms of selection are possible. First, our Undergraduate Advisor might identify volunteers from those students declaring their intention to pursue a major in History. In return for a guarantee of their anonymity, these students would be asked to deposit with the Undergraduate Advisor copies of major papers written for their courses in History, culminating in their capstone paper. Alternatively, portfolios might be compiled from those students who have taken their "Bascom" courses in the History Department and gone on to major in History. In either case the portfolio would provide a clear, substantial and demonstrable indication of students' progress toward the educational goals identified above.
2. [Possible alternative to method 1: annual collection of selected senior theses and papers written for History 600 seminars.]

3. Brief survey: This instrument would take the form of a two-page (maximum) questionnaire to be distributed to former majors one year after their graduation. The questionnaire would seek outcome-oriented information, including whether or not the student has entered postgraduate study (in History or other disciplines), whether the student has taken employment in a history-related field and whether the History major prepared them for their present pursuits. The questionnaire would end on an open-ended question inviting reflections on the student's experience as a history major.

C. Feedback:

In partnership with the Undergraduate Advisor, the Undergraduate Council will conduct annual assessments using the instruments stipulated above. A subcommittee of the Council comprised of two faculty members, the Undergraduate Advisor, and an undergraduate representative of student history organizations will each year compile an annual report on the achievement of the department's educational goals, based on their assessment of the information yielded by the assessment procedure. They will present this report first to the Undergraduate Council, which will draft recommendations for measures to facilitate the achievement of the prevailing educational goals, revisions to those goals themselves, or to the assessment instruments. Subsequently, the Joint Committee on Teaching will discuss this report and recommendations before presenting it and final recommendations to the Department.