

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY ASSESSMENT PLAN

(May 2006)

I) UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM

The Department of History's undergraduate assessment plan was drawn up by the Undergraduate Council and adopted by the Department in December 1996. We conducted intensive assessments of undergraduate learning between 1999 and 2002, in the period immediately preceding and following our Department 10 year review. The Department has not, however, conducted in-depth assessment since the spring of 2002 – in part because of the lack of institutional memory (rapid turnover of the Directors of Undergraduate Studies) and, more importantly, because the Undergraduate Council spent considerable time revamping the undergraduate major. Our new major has been in place since the Fall of 2005 and we estimate that by the Spring of 2007 the vast majority of our graduates will have fulfilled the new requirements. The new major requires students to have breadth of historical knowledge (geographically and chronologically) and requires them to take at least four courses in one of twelve thematic or geographical concentrations that have a common intellectual theme. It would be propitious for the department to conduct a new round of assessment at some point in 2007-2008 in order evaluate the new major.

The Department had 737 declared majors in 2005-06 and conferred 199 History degrees in that same year. To assess such a large number of students, we have followed a two pronged evaluation strategy that focuses a) on web based exit surveys of our majors and b) random evaluation of the papers of students enrolled in our required History 600 capstone seminar. Our assessment procedures were designed to measure if students are reaching the goals the Department has set out for its majors. By the time they graduate, our students should acquire:

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
5. The ability to write clear and coherent prose.

Past Assessments:

Before turning to our current recommendations, it is worth reviewing the undergraduate assessments that have been undertaken over the past ten years. In the Spring of 1999, 2001 and 2002 the Department conducted web based surveys of graduating majors. The response rate was relatively strong in 1999 and 2001 (148 and 134 respectively – we achieved these high numbers by promising respondents that they would be included in a random drawing for free pizza) and declined in 2002 (44 – no free pizza that year). The battery of questions (see attachment) reveal a relatively high degree of satisfaction among our majors, and student responses on a series of questions were substantially more positive in 2001 than two years earlier. The survey results were tabulated and graphed, but do not appear to have been analyzed in any depth in a written report that we could find. The Department's December 2000 self study did take account of these surveys and recommended earlier student access to History 600 seminars and greater course offerings at the 200 (intermediate) level. In the Fall of 1999, two members of the Undergraduate Council evaluated a 50% random sample of the papers written for the History 600 capstone seminars that semester (46 papers). The Committee found that, by and large, the papers met the goals the Department had set for its majors.

Current Recommendations:

The Undergraduate Council is responsible for overseeing assessment activities. In the winter of 2006, the Council reviewed the Department's assessment plan and found that the broad outline of the plan –in terms of what to evaluate and how to evaluate it – was not in need of substantial revision. The Council did, however, make a number of recommendations concerning assessment:

1. The Undergraduate Council should develop (in 2006-07) a revised exit evaluation survey that we will administer through DoIt (WebSurvey@UW). This survey will be a substantially revised version of the undergraduate web based surveys we successfully undertook in 1999, 2001, and 2002. The new survey will also assess the main facets of our new undergraduate major. All graduating history majors will be asked to fill out this survey beginning in May 2007. We will also consider administering the survey (or a revised version thereof) to alumni who have graduated within the past three years to assess if and how the skills they learned as undergraduates have served them in their future professional and educational careers.
2. All Senior Thesis students will be asked to submit an electronic copy of their thesis to the History Department (we are currently doing this)
3. Students in History 600 capstone seminars (required of all our majors) will be required to submit electronic copies of their seminar papers to the department. We have required printed copies in the past, but simply do not have the room or the staff to archive hundreds of undergraduate papers per year. On a periodic basis (every second year) we will evaluate a random sample of these

papers in order to assess if majors are acquiring the knowledge and the skills the Department expects them to develop.

4. The Chair of the Undergraduate Council will appoint a 2 person subcommittee charged with overseeing assessment that will report back to the Council once per semester. Yearly assessment – whether in the form of evaluating samples of undergraduate writing, or in the form of exit surveys of our majors – will be part of the Undergraduate Council’s mandate.
5. The language of our 1996 assessment plan should be revised to reflect the objectives of our new undergraduate major and provide a clearer discussion of our assessments tools.

Our objective is to collect data on an annual basis (a practice that we seem to have discontinued since 2002) in order to have sufficient data to conduct periodic assessment in the future.

Over the past year, the History Department Undergraduate Council has also been engaged in other forms of assessment. We have made substantial progress in revising our undergraduate course evaluations (our current ones have not been revisited in 18 years). Our new course evaluations have been extensively discussed by the Undergraduate Council and the Department and should be adopted in the early Fall 2006. The new evaluations combine questions about teaching effectiveness with questions that address course specific goals. In an attempt to evaluate whether we are more successful at teaching majors and non-majors, men and women, and students of different ethnic origin, we are also asking students to respond a range of demographic questions. The Undergraduate Council is currently also undertaking a study of the History 680-690 seminar: this two semester sequence was meant to provide support and accompany all history senior thesis writers throughout their year of research and writing. The course, taught by a broad range of History faculty, has been in place for some 8 years now, and we are currently reviewing it with an eye to making recommendations for improvement. Finally, the History Department offers 8 undergraduate writing prizes each year (including one for the best senior thesis) and receives on average over 50 submissions for these prizes. The faculty committee that reads all the submissions also uses this opportunity to evaluate the skills of this particular group of undergraduates.

II) GRADUATE PROGRAM

Goals:

The primary goal of the Graduate Program in History is to prepare students for successful employment as professional historians in college and university settings. This goal requires proficiency in four broad areas:

1. **Research:** The student develops a familiarity with historical sources, methods and themes generally and expertise in the sources, methods and historiography of one region or nation.
2. **Analysis and Presentation of Research:** The student learns to construct and present in oral and written form an original, significant and persuasive historical argument, based on primary research, with appropriate scholarly apparatus.
3. **Teaching:** The student gains experience in designing and teaching courses on the undergraduate level.
4. **Community:** The student comes to understand his/her role as a member of a professional community.

Means and Methods of Assessment:

Research, Analysis and Presentation:

1. The MA coursework and thesis develop basic skills and lay the foundation for expertise in the area of concentration. The thesis (administered by a three-person faculty committee) serves as a diagnostic tool to assess growing competency in the areas of research and in the ability of the student to formulate and present a persuasive original historical argument.
2. The Minor Field course requirement ensures basic familiarity with at least one area outside of the major area of concentration.
3. Administered by a faculty committee, the Preliminary Examinations assess the student's proficiency (both written and oral) in his/her major field of concentration.
4. The Dissertation serves as the final diagnostic tool to ensure that students have achieved a high level of skill in research, analysis and the presentation of historical argumentation. A five-person faculty committee drawn from within and beyond the History Department evaluates the written dissertation and conducts a two-hour oral examination of the candidate.

Teaching:

All graduate students are offered the opportunity to act as teaching assistants.

All TAs are supervised by the faculty member teaching the course, who visits sections, meets regularly with the TA, and prepares a written evaluation of the TA at the end of the semester.

The Department's Joint Committee on Teaching Assistants oversees the TAing experience of all graduate students. JCOTA makes assignments, provides training, and administers and assesses student evaluations of all classes. New TAs are evaluated after seven weeks by students; all TAs are evaluated at the end of the semester by both students and the supervising faculty member. A special department project assistant on teaching (attached to the Joint Committee) acts as a mentor to students having difficulty with teaching and organizes special pedagogical workshops and periodic diversity training.

Membership in a Professional Community:

Faculty advisers encourage students to attend professional conferences in their fields and, at a suitable stage of their training, to submit paper proposals.

The Graduate Program sponsors a monthly Graduate Student Forum, where graduate students in all programs at all stages are invited to present their work. Audiences provide critical feedback.

The Graduate Program sponsors a series of "professional development" workshops across the year, on such topics as constructing a CV, writing a job letter, submitting a proposal, preparing for a job interview, and preparing for an on-campus interview.

Graduate students are encouraged to participate in local community projects where their skills as a historian may be useful.

Forms of Programmatic Assessment:

Seminar Evaluations: Graduate students anonymously evaluate all History Department graduate seminars in terms of content, written assignments, reading assignments and pedagogy.

Program Evaluation: The Graduate Council, the primary administrative body for the Graduate Program, performs the function of ongoing assessment. The Council, which includes faculty, staff, and graduate student representatives, meets monthly. The Director of Graduate Studies reports on the Council's activities at monthly Department meetings. In addition, the Director of Graduate Studies reports on the broad state of the graduate program at the final department meeting of each year.

Laird Boswell, Director of Undergraduate Studies
 Jeanne Boydston, Director of Graduate Studies
 May 2006

Department of History Assessment Survey for Majors
Web-based survey (1999, 2001 & 2002)

1. Rate the effectiveness of your training in the department to developing the ability to define historical problems and to identify the resources necessary to explore them?

1) Very effective 2) Moderately effective 3) Not very effective 4) unable to evaluate
2. Rate the effectiveness of your training in the department to developing the ability to conduct basic historical research involving critical assessment of a variety of evidentiary sources?

1) Very effective 2) Moderately effective 3) Not very effective 4) unable to evaluate
3. Rate the effectiveness of your training in the department to developing the ability to apply appropriate methods and theories in discussion of historical events?

1) Very effective 2) Moderately effective 3) Not very effective 4) unable to evaluate
4. Rate the effectiveness of your training in the department to developing the ability to construct organized and substantiated oral and written arguments dealing with historical questions?

1) Very effective 2) Moderately effective 3) Not very effective 4) unable to evaluate
5. How effective was the Department of History in giving you a general knowledge of world history?

1) Very effective 2) Moderately effective 3) Not very effective 4) unable to evaluate
6. How effective was the Department of History in giving you a more specific knowledge of history in your area, period, or field of concentration?

1) Very effective 2) Moderately effective 3) Not very effective 4) unable to evaluate
7. In your history courses, did you get a general knowledge of the historical methods, theories and debates relating to the specific areas taught?

1) All the time 2) Some of the time 3) Occasionally 4) never 5) unable to judge
8. How do you rate the range of courses available?

1) Excellent 2) Very good 3) Good 4) Fair 5) Poor
9. How do you rate the value of the required breadth courses?

1) Excellent 2) Very good 3) Good 4) Fair 5) Poor

10. How do you rate the value of the 600 level seminar course required in the major?

1) Excellent 2) Very good 3) Good 4) Fair 5) Poor

11. Which history courses had the most interest for you?

1) American 2) Non-western 3) European 4) Ancient/Medieval

12. During the 99-00 to 01-02 academic years, how many times did you meet with an advisor?

1) Never 2) Once 3) More than once

13. How do you most often contact your advisor?

1) Private appointment 2) Open office hours 3) Email note 4) phone call

14. How do you rate the academic advising you received?

1) Excellent 2) Very Good 3) Good 4) Fair 5) Poor

15. During the semester did you have difficulty scheduling an appointment or meeting with history faculty?

1) No 2) Sometimes 3) Often 4) All the time

16. How well have your starting expectations of UW-Madison been met?

1) Extremely well 2) Somewhat well 3) Not at all

17. How do you rate the value of what you learned in your history courses?

1) Excellent 2) Very Good 3) Good 4) Fair 5) Poor

18. How do you rate the overall quality of instruction provided by History faculty?

1) Excellent 2) Very Good 3) Good 4) Fair 5) Poor

19. How do you rate the overall quality of instruction provided by TAs?

1) Excellent 2) Very Good 3) Good 4) Fair 5) Poor