

Department of History Assessment Report

(July 2008)

Overview of History Assessment Plan

The Department of History's assessment plan has been regularly updated since it was first adopted in 1996. It was last revised in 2006. Our assessment strategy focuses on three areas:

First, we assess the writing and analytical skills of our seniors. All history majors are required to take a capstone seminar in their senior year (History 600) and are asked to submit an electronic copy of their seminar paper to the Department. The History Department Undergraduate Council regularly evaluates a random sample of these papers to determine whether students are acquiring the knowledge and skills the Department expects them to master. Our next evaluation of History 600 papers is scheduled for the 2008-09 academic year. We have also established an electronic collection of History Senior theses (circa 20-30 per year); about half of these are read by faculty who are ranking them for prizes, and we may choose to evaluate Senior Theses as a whole in the future.

Second, we recently finalized an in-class exit survey that we will administer to our graduating seniors each academic year (students fill out the paper survey in their History 600 capstone seminar, a class that most of them take their senior year). The survey asks students to reflect on their undergraduate career and their experiences as history majors. The History Undergraduate Council developed this survey with the expert guidance of Elaine Klein in L&S and John Stevenson at the UW Survey Center (a copy of the survey is attached). We first administered the survey in the Spring 2008, and expect to do so each semester from now on.

Finally, we are planning to develop a survey of recent History majors (5 to 7 years out) and we have just received L&S assessment funding to do so. Our objective is to conduct an in-depth survey of recent alumni in the Spring of 2009. We expect that the survey will help us compare data from graduating seniors to survey results from alumni who have been out a number of years, who have had a chance to look back on their undergraduate experience, and who have been able to measure the relevance of the training they received at UW Madison. We know very little about what our majors do after graduation – in terms of further professional training and in terms of career fields. Knowing more about our graduates would surely help us think about how to adapt our curriculum to the changing needs of our students.

Learning Objectives

History majors should be able to master the following five key skills:

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.

Our current assessment procedures measure whether students have acquired these skills during the course of their undergraduate education. The History Undergraduate Council will revisit these learning objectives in 2008-09 and determine whether they need to be revised to take into greater account the LEAP “Essential Learning Outcomes.”

Impact of Assessment

We have just received the results of the senior exit survey that was administered in May 2008 (120 respondents). The History Undergraduate Council will be discussing the results of the survey this coming fall, and will do so on a yearly basis from now on. Based on its discussions the Council will prepare a summary report that includes a list of recommendations for Department discussion and action. A cursory look at the results of the survey suggests that students believe we are doing a good job teaching fundamental research and analytical skills, and that we do an even better job helping students develop their ability to make written arguments. We don't perform as well when time comes to teaching students to make oral arguments. The survey also underlines we should do more to help majors identify potential career fields and help them understand the “real world” relevance of the skills they acquire in our courses (or perhaps we should help them develop different kinds of skills). We have already begun to work in some of these areas by setting up a regular schedule of workshops to guide students in the post graduation world (e.g., “what can I do with a history major?” “How to write a resume,” “How to apply to law school, professional school, and other graduate programs.”) Beginning in the fall of 2008, a major section of our undergraduate website will be dedicated to providing our students with career guidance. The Senior Exit Survey also included a battery of questions about Undergraduate Advising that will assist us in identifying the strength and weaknesses of our advising services. Finally, the Department undertook, for the first time in twenty years, a major

revision of its undergraduate course evaluations. The new evaluations (first used in the 2007-08 academic year) combine questions about teaching effectiveness with questions that address course specific goals. The results are analyzed by individual faculty, who can then choose to make changes to their courses and teaching techniques. We also monitor the Department wide scores on a whole set of questions linked to teaching effectiveness.

Department of History

Senior Exit Questionnaire

Please think about your time as an undergraduate and your experience as a history major. (Please circle the appropriate answer)

As you think about the History courses you took, how much did they:

1. Help you understand how to conduct historical research?

Not at all A little Somewhat Quite a bit A lot

2. Help you understand how to construct a historical argument?

Not at all A little Somewhat Quite a bit A lot

3. Teach you how to analyze texts critically?

Not at all A little Somewhat Quite a bit A lot

4. Teach you to evaluate historical data critically?

Not at all A little Somewhat Quite a bit A lot

5. Teach you how to apply methods and theories to analyze historical data?

Not at all A little Somewhat Quite a bit A lot

6. Help you understand current events from a historical perspective?

Not at all A little Somewhat Quite a bit A lot

7. Develop your ability to make oral arguments?

Not at all A little Somewhat Quite a bit A lot

8. Develop your ability to make written arguments?

Not at all A little Somewhat Quite a bit A lot

9. Help you learn how to access sources for historical research on the Web?

Not at all A little Somewhat Quite a bit A lot

SURVEY CONTINUED ON BACK

10. Help you learn how to access sources for historical research in the library?

Not at all A little Somewhat Quite a bit A lot

11. Provide you with a strong foundation for possible graduate study in history?

Not at all A little Somewhat Quite a bit A lot

12. Provide you with a strong foundation for possible graduate study in a range of fields outside of history?

Not at all A little Somewhat Quite a bit A lot

13. Provide you with skills that could transfer to the workplace?

Not at all A little Somewhat Quite a bit A lot

14. Expand your awareness of potential career fields?

Not at all A little Somewhat Quite a bit A lot

15. How well did your 100 and 200- level courses in history prepare you for upper-level history courses?

Not at all A little Somewhat Quite a bit A lot

16. The purpose of the History 600 seminar is to bring together the knowledge, skills, and methods you have learned in your previous history courses. How well did your previous history courses prepare you for being successful in your History 600 seminar?

Not at all A little Somewhat Quite a bit A lot

Comment: This suggestion came from UGC. Not sure exactly how folks wanted it worded though?

17. In my 600 seminar, I learned to conduct historical research.

Not at all A little Somewhat Quite a bit A lot

18. Overall, how would you rate your satisfaction with the History major?

Very dissatisfied Moderately dissatisfied Slightly dissatisfied

In between Slightly satisfied Moderately satisfied Very satisfied

19. If you could improve one aspect of the history major, what would it be? Why?

20. When do you plan to graduate?

May 2008 Dec 2009 Other _____

21. Are you a history major?

Yes _____ No _____

A History and Education major?

Yes _____ No _____

Advising Exit Survey Questions

1. During the past academic year, since September 2007, how often did you contact (in-person, via email, or phone) your **History Advisors, Liz Preston or Scott Burkhardt**?

_____ times since September 2007

If the answer is 0, please skip to Question 8

2. Were the **History Advisors** generally available to meet with you?
Not at all A little Somewhat Very Extremely
3. How knowledgeable were the **History Advisors** about major and degree requirements?
Not at all A little Somewhat Very Extremely N/A
4. How effective were the **History Advisors** in making you aware of campus policies?
Not at all A little Somewhat Very Extremely N/A
5. How knowledgeable were the **History Advisors** about graduate school preparation?
Not at all A little Somewhat Very Extremely N/A
6. How knowledgeable were the **History Advisors** about internship and career exploration?
Not at all A little Somewhat Very Extremely N/A
7. What comments do you have about the advising you received from the Undergraduate **History Advisors**?

8. During the past academic year, since September 2007, how often did you meet with the **History Peer Advisors**? Peer Advisors are undergraduate history majors with senior standing who help with academic advising.

_____ times since September 2007

If the answer is 0, please skip to Question 15

SURVEY CONTINUED ON BACK

9. Were the History **Peer Advisors** generally available to meet with you?

Not at all A little Somewhat Very Extremely

10. How knowledgeable were the History **Peer Advisors** about major and degree requirements?

Not at all A little Somewhat Very Extremely N/A

11. How effective were the History **Peer Advisors** in making you aware of campus policies?

Not at all A little Somewhat Very Extremely N/A

12. How knowledgeable were the **History Peer Advisors** about graduate school preparation?

Not at all A little Somewhat Very Extremely N/A

13. How knowledgeable were the **History Peer Advisors** about internship and career exploration?

Not at all A little Somewhat Very Extremely N/A

14. What comments do you have about the advising you received from the Undergraduate **History Peer Advisors**?

15. Have you ever visited the **History Department Undergraduate website**?

Not at all A little Somewhat Very Extremely

16. Are you aware that the following information is available on the History Department **Undergraduate website**? (Check all that apply)

- Scheduling an appointment with the History Advisors
- History Advisor and Peer Advisor walk-in hours
- History course and syllabi information
- History faculty contact information and office hours
- Special events calendar
- Tips on conducting historical research and writing historical papers

16. How useful do you find information posted on the History Department **Undergraduate website**?

Not at all A little Somewhat Very Extremely

17. How user friendly was the History Department **Undergraduate website**?

Not at all A little Somewhat Very Extremely

18. If you could improve one thing about the History Department **Undergraduate website** what would that be? Why?

19. Do you find any of the following **email announcements** forwarded by the History Department useful? (Check all that apply)

- Upcoming lectures and special events
- Workshops related to applying to graduate school and career options for history majors
- On-campus and off-campus internship and job openings
- Campus events
- Academic and scholarship deadlines and information

20. Do you remember receiving **email announcements** from the History Department about guest lectures, campus events, and internship postings?

Not at all A little Somewhat Very Extremely

21. How interested are you in having the History Department continue to forward these **email announcements**?

Not at all A little Somewhat Very Extremely