

## Plan for Assessing the History Major, 2011-2014

approved by UGC on March 9, 2011

For the three years of 2011-14, the History Department will assess 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.

Every April, the Undergraduate Council will review results of the assessment data, and forward to the department recommendations based on the results.

[Update: In fall 2012, based on the results of these assessment activities in 2011, the History department established new requirements for the History major that require students to take a HIST 201 Historian's Craft course before their capstone HIST 600 seminar. These requirements go into effect for students declaring the major after September 1, 2013.]

We plan to conduct this assessment using the following tools:

### **A. 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

We plan to conduct four focus groups in each spring semester of the three-year assessment period. These groups will: 1) generate ideas for improvement of the major and career connection advising; 2) provide qualitative feedback on the effectiveness of various courses and events in assisting student acquisition and awareness of skills; 3) tell us how well-prepared students feel; and 4) produce a transcript of students talking about the connection between the major and various career opportunities, which can then be used to assess Goal 3 directly.

In consultation with Doug McLeod (Communication Arts), we have developed the following plan:

- 6-person focus groups (invite 8 students to yield 6-8)
- 2 hours long (participants often don't "warm up" until the second hour.)
- held in spring 2012, 2013, and 2014
- four focus groups in each period (to alleviate the idiosyncratic biases of small groups)
- run by an advanced graduate student, from outside the department, trained and experienced in facilitating focus groups (who will not stand in a relationship of power vis-à-vis the students)
- recorded on tape or video (in order to produce a transcript, preferably one which identifies the speakers and can correlate speakers to short surveys filled out at the beginning of each session)
- refreshments provided (to establish a relaxed atmosphere and sense of community conducive to the sharing of ideas.)

Either when students agree to participate or as they arrive in the room, they will be asked to answer 3-4 questions in their own words in writing. (For example: 1-What are the skills you have learned as a history major? 2-Why are those skills important? 3- How are those skills connected to one or more careers?)

## **B. Online Test**

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

Before and after HIST 201 (the new Historian's Craft course) and before HIST 600 (the capstone research seminar), students will take an online multiple-choice test/survey designed to test basic research skills. It will be set up, administered, and the results tabulated and archived, by the Head TA for HIST 201 each semester.

Results will not be tracked by individuals, but can be broken down by: 1) whether a student has taken HIST 201 or not; 2) how many history courses a student has taken.

[Update: Beginning in Fall 2012, we also began administering the online test to students completing the HIST 600 capstone seminar. This allows us to get a sense of the development of students' skills by the time they complete the requirements of the major.]

## **C. Senior Exit Survey**

All majors are asked to complete an online exit survey upon completion of their HIST 600 seminar. This survey includes several questions both about the major and about the

department's advising services. Responses to questions about writing, research, and career connections will be used to address the assessment goals of this plan.

#### **D. Common Rubric to Assess Final 600 Seminar Papers (partial)**

- Direct assessment of Goals 1 and 2 (research and writing)
- Direct assessment of effectiveness of "Historian's Craft" courses in preparing students for the capstone research seminar (since the assessment will yield data on students who have and have not taken the "Historian's Craft" course)

Each semester, three or more instructors of HIST 600 seminars will each use a common rubric (focusing on Goals 1 and 2), in addition to their own grading techniques, to assess all final papers in their seminars. Copies of the completed rubrics for all papers, along with a brief description by the professor of the expectations for those papers, will be submitted to the Director of Undergraduate Studies for compilation, analysis, and preservation by the undergraduate advising staff and, when appropriate, the UGC. Participating HIST 600 professors should also include a statement similar to the following on their syllabi: "The history department reserves the right to collect information, including copies of papers, for the purposes of assessing and improving this course and the major."

[Update: Based on the recommendations of the Undergraduate Council in spring 2012 (after independent reviews of the rubric results in previous semesters), the rubrics now utilize a 5-point scale: scores of 4 or 5 in an area are considered to demonstrate proficiency; scores of 1, 2, or 3 demonstrate lack of proficiency.]

Depending upon staff availability, we also aim to track the course records of the sampled paper writers in order to assess the effectiveness of history courses, and perhaps particular sequences of history courses, in preparing students to conduct and present research. The Undergraduate Advisor(s) and/or peer advisors(s) and/or MIU head TA (if at some point redefined as also in charge of assessment) will create a spreadsheet for all papers graded according to the rubric. Using the names and identifying numbers on the rubrics to obtain the data, but not creating a permanent association between each record and the student's name, the spreadsheet will record for each rubric/paper: 1) the result of the questions on the rubric; 2) whether the student took HIST 201; 3) how many history courses the student had taken by this point; and other questions as determined. Results and changes in results over time can then be calculated from this data. E.g., do students who took HIST 201 perform better in some categories than those who did not take HIST 201? Which categories seem most challenging to students? Does the number of history courses taken seem to correlate with improved performance?