

Wells College History Major 2017 Assessment Report

Executive Statement

The HIST program included two tenured faculty members and one adjunct during the 2016-17 academic year. Staffing constraints limited the ability of the HIST faculty to engage in comprehensive long-term curricular planning, but current faculty have continued to work to explore new pedagogies and formalize assessment policies and procedures. The recent hire of a full-time colleague in nonwestern history (who has experience in assessment) should enable the HIST faculty to focus more on student learning outcomes, engage in even more substantive curricular planning, and improve our assessment practices for the future.

I. Assessment Meetings

The full-time tenured HIST faculty spoke casually about assessment throughout the year, and frequently discussed individual students' struggles and achievements and general issues in the classroom. More focused discussions regarding assessment issues and student performance occurred in early December when the History faculty reviewed the senior theses (graded collaboratively) and in late spring when they discussed the criteria for evaluating thesis presentations and senior comprehensive exams. The history faculty met on May 23rd and May 24th to revise the program assessment plan and produce an assessment report for 2017.

II. Closing the Loop.

We are committed to improving the learning experiences of our students and anticipate making some changes that could help enhance student performance. We also intend to keep better track of data to support future assessment reports. See Part III and IV below for details.

III. Examination of Assessment Data

Goal 1. Develop analytical skills to enable students to become well informed, critical, and active citizens.

- Objective:* Students read primary and secondary sources actively and critically.

All HIST courses require students to demonstrate active critical reading through reading reflections, discussion questions, quizzes, or short responses in various forms. Faculty have formalized grading rubrics for such

assignments. Measurement tools reveal that the majority of students engage critically with readings. However, the number of students who fail to complete such assignments remains a source of concern.

Goal 2. Think creatively and critically to compose well-reasoned arguments and interpretations.

- *Objective:* Students interpret source material, draw conclusions, and compose written arguments

The HIST program remains writing intensive, from short critical responses to interpretive essays and longer research papers. Faculty members have been deliberate and conscientious in providing feedback on written work, but grading rubrics remain somewhat informal in certain areas. The overwhelming majority of students demonstrate development in their writing skills.

- *Objective:* Students develop oral communication skills.

Students consistently evaluate the in-class experience in HIST courses very highly. Classes remain discussion-based, and students regularly engage in classroom debate, role-playing activities, and in-class group work. HIST faculty have applied formal rubrics to evaluate in class speeches and informal rubrics to assess formal presentations. Most students significantly improve their skills in oral presentation and discussion during the semester and over the four years of college.

Goal 3. Develop technological and research skills that enable students to access, critically evaluate, and utilize information effectively.

Objective: Students learn how to engage in original research.

Other than the senior essay, the quality of research projects remains inconsistent. Despite specific instructions, formal training in research skills, and assistance by librarians, student bibliographies remain thin and engagement with professional scholarly sources limited. Students continue to rely heavily on the internet, and analysis in many cases remains rather superficial. A small minority did not complete the work.

Goal 4. Develop an appreciation of difference and diversity by cultivating a sense of shared humanity.

Objective: Students learn how to compare and contrast different peoples and cultures across time and space

The HIST program has been able to offer a variety of courses at different levels in US, European, and nonwestern history, as well as distinct chronological periods (ancient, medieval, early modern, and modern). Quizzes, examinations, and interpretive essays reveal that the overwhelming majority of students demonstrate proficiency in at least one of the geographic areas and familiarity with at least two chronological periods.

Goal 5. Develop expertise in the discipline of history.

Objective: Students learn how to think historically and learn the interpretative nature of historical scholarship.

HIST 375 remains among the most popular and valuable courses for majors and minors, who all produced solid research papers this year. In 2017 the three senior majors produced substantive senior theses grounded in scholarly research. The written comprehensive exam remains a valuable means by which graduating seniors review their academic career in history at Wells, exhibit their historical knowledge, and reflect more seriously about their educational experience as a whole. Students consistently demonstrate a genuine understanding of historical interpretation in their comprehensive exams.

IV. Program Changes for Upcoming Year

The HIST faculty looks forward to our new full-time colleague, a specialist in Asian, Southeast Asian, and comparative World History. These offerings will greatly enhance the offerings of our academic program for all Wells students.

HIST faculty will put more focus on issues related to careers and job searching, such as writing resumes and cover letters, exposing students to professions particularly suited to history majors (museums, archives, libraries and information services, documentary films, journalism, etc.), and other professional matters.

HIST faculty will endeavor to keep better track of our graduates with exit interviews or surveys, to document what they do immediately upon graduation and where they are five and 10 years after leaving Wells. We believe that this information will provide helpful information when assessing the value of studying history as a preparation for careers and a meaningful life.

V. Actions for the Upcoming Year and Updated Assessment Plan

The HIST faculty continue to make incremental progress in their effort to formalize assessment and bring assessment procedures closer in line with EPC standards and will continue in that effort.

The HIST faculty looks forward to welcoming our new full-time colleague. His arrival offers us an opportunity to establish a series of on-going conversation about pedagogy, assessment, varied assignments, and best practices--where we three can work more intentionally toward curriculum development, improved assessment tools, and enhanced student learning.

Having made some progress during the 2016-2017 academic year in formalizing assessment criteria for reading reflections, group activities, oral presentations, and shorter assignments, HIST faculty will

Continue in their efforts to formalize rubrics for assignments – most notably for longer essays and the senior thesis, using resources provided by the American Historical Association and other professional organizations

Continue to explore strategies of improving student performance in research projects, response papers, and short essays.

Continue to reexamine and revise the senior comprehensive exam to encourage students to reflect as broadly and as meaningfully on their academic experience as possible.

HIST faculty have not engaged in conversations about student portfolios as hoped. The program's 2016 report expressed the faculty's desire to explore various ways of utilizing student portfolios throughout a student's career to engage students in critical thinking and empower students in taking responsibility for their own learning, and as tools for evaluating the effectiveness of educational programs. However, a survey of portfolio literature suggested that students need more guidance in assembling portfolios than the faculty felt able to provide last Fall. Yet, the HIST faculty remains interested in developing this tool, both to help students reflect on their own learning, as well as an aid in evaluating the effectiveness of the HIST program.

