

Wells College History Major 2018 Assessment

I. Assessment Meetings

The three members of the history faculty spoke informally about assessment and student progress throughout the year. More focused discussions regarding assessment occurred in early December when the faculty reviewed senior theses and in late spring when they evaluated thesis presentations and senior comprehensive exams. All the history faculty met for two hours on June 5th to address assessment and begin to draft an assessment report for the 2017-2018 academic year. Electronic communication and coordination continues over the summer of 2018.

II. Closing the Loop

The history faculty are committed to improving the learning experiences of our students and continue to explore strategies to enhance student performance and outcomes. Guided by our new assistant professor (who has had experience with assessment procedures at another institution), we devoted most of our discussions and energies this spring toward constructing more helpful rubrics and devising improved instruments for data collection. Our goal is to generate more relevant data by using a standardized rubric and targeting specific classes and student-types over the year for future assessment reports. Ultimately, we intend to use this data to assess and find ways to improve our teaching and career preparation. See Parts III and IV below for a more detailed explanation.

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 response papers. Faculty members have formalized grading rubrics for such assignments (see appendix).

Measurement tools reveal that the majority of students engage critically with readings to some extent. When students do not succeed, it is usually because they do not attend class or complete work. We continue to discuss methods to better engage and reach out to students who do not attend class or complete work (e.g., being mindful of our rubrics and transparent with our expectations in assignments, etc.).

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 response papers to interpretive essays and longer research papers. Faculty have been deliberate and conscientious in providing feedback on written work. We continue to rethink, revise, and improve our rubrics to be more detailed and helpful.

- The overwhelming majority of students demonstrate development in their writing skills. However, the number of students who fail to complete such assignments remains a source of concern.

- *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 developed several rubrics to assess both informal debate and formal oral presentations. Most students improve their skills in oral presentation and discussion over the course of the semester; they show significant improvement over their four years.

- All senior majors give formal public presentations of their senior essays. This year one senior history major was invited to deliver the student commencement address at graduation ceremonies.
- Our history students are routinely hired as interns and docents at regional museums and historical societies, further testifying to their oral presentation skills.

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.

During the 2017-18 academic year, eight history courses and seminars required students to complete a substantial research paper/project:

FALL 2017

HIST 285, History of Epidemics, 14 students

HIST 328, The Early American Republic, 7 students

HIST 375, Writing History 4 students

SPRING 2018

HIST 285, Chinese history, 2 students

HIST 285-01, War in Film 8 students

HIST 285, Southeast Asia, 6 students

HIST 310, Colonial and Revolutionary America, 5 students
HIST 385, Multicultural America, 4 students

We saw a marked improvement over last year's student outcomes in this area. All 50 students who enrolled in these courses completed their research paper assignments. Below are the combined statistics indicating student performance for all eight courses.

50% (25 of 50) in the A range

34% (17 of 50) in the B range

8% (4 of 50) in the C range

6% (3 of 5) in the D range

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

- *Objective:* Students learn about a range of human experience and how to compare and contrast different peoples and cultures across time and space.

In recent years the HIST program has been able to offer a variety of courses that focus on diversity and difference: US, European, and non-western history, distinct chronological periods (ancient, medieval, early modern, and modern), as well as ethnicity, religion, race, and gender.

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. Enrollment patterns suggest that students are particularly interested in courses that provide comparative perspectives and focus on race, gender, and non-western cultures.

- Students typically choose research topics dealing with minorities, underrepresented populations, forgotten people,

peoples in other parts of the world, and peoples of earlier eras. Senior theses during the past three years have included studies of African-American women and the civil rights movement, colonialism in the Congo, gay, lesbian, and transgendered people, Emperor Hirohito and WWII, “human zoos” as a product of colonialism, the Mongol empire during the 12th century, and myths in Medieval Britain.

Goal 5. Develop expertise in the discipline of history.

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

While all Wells history courses introduce historical thinking, HIST 375 (Writing History: Theory and Practice, usually taken in the junior year) remains a central course for preparing majors and minors seeking to gain a more sophisticated understanding of method and historiography that will prepare them for writing their senior theses.

- This year all the students in HIST 375 produced fine research papers

A history major’s experience culminates in a capstone experience that includes HIST 401, HIST 402, and comprehensive examination whereby graduating seniors review their academic career at Wells and reflect more seriously about their educational experience as a whole.

- This year, all three senior majors:
 - Earned “A” grades for substantive theses grounded in solid scholarly research
 - Composed thoughtful responses to comprehensive exam questions that demonstrated sophisticated understanding of basic concepts important to the historians (e.g., change over time, the value of critical analysis, and status of different kinds of sources, historians’ perspectives, etc.)
 - Received nomination for *Distinction in the Major*
 - Graduated with Latin honors
 - Earned acceptance into competitive graduate school programs (with fellowship support)

IV. Program Changes for Upcoming Year

Having made some progress during the 2017-18 academic year in formalizing assessment criteria for reading reflections, group activities, oral presentations, and shorter assignments, HIST faculty will continue to formalize rubrics for different assignments – most notably for longer essays, the senior thesis, and senior comprehensive exam – with the ultimate goal to measure student progress so as to assess and improve our teaching methods.

This year HIST faculty put more focus on issues related to careers and professional development. We initiated a biannual guest lecture series so that our students could interact with other professional historians and see the many career paths opened by attaining a degree in history. HIST 375 focused some on career issues and job searching, such as writing resumes and cover letters, exposed students to professions particularly suited to history majors (museums, archives, libraries and information services, documentary films, journalism, etc.), and other professional matters. We expect to continue those efforts, perhaps in a workshop or by having occasional panel discussions of recent history graduates talking about their jobs.

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 follow where they are five and 10 years after leaving Wells.

The HIST faculty looks forward to scheduling more time together in an informal on-going monthly series of conversations 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.

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.

Having revised the program mission and updated its assessment plan to identify goals, objectives, and measurements more precisely, in 2018-19 the HIST faculty will:

- Commit to having at least three formal assessment meetings each year: one early in the fall to refine our plans and proposed rubrics, one between the fall and spring semesters to review the past semester and look ahead, and at least one meeting at the end of the spring term to review and create the next assessment report.
- Continue in our efforts to formalize grading rubrics, consulting resources provided by the American Historical Association and other professional organizations as well as on-campus experts.
- Continue to explore strategies of improving student performance in their research projects (e.g., utilizing databases effectively, providing more focused training in *Chicago* manual of style and formatting, working more closely with the librarians, using interlibrary loans, etc.)
- Work on strategies to improve student attendance and completion of work.