

Wells College History Major 2014 Assessment

Executive Statement

The HIST major is currently in a state of significant flux. A recent retirement and a faculty resignation have reduced the major to two full-time tenured faculty members and have notably constrained the ability of the major to provide required coursework and otherwise contribute to the Sustainable Community General Education Curriculum. The HIST major currently has multiple needs across both time (e.g., coverage of ancient, medieval, and modern periods) and space – specifically coverage of “non-western” areas. Coursework on regions such as East Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East is particularly urgent. Over the past couple of semesters we have been fortunate enough to have hired an adjunct to teach a course or two on an *ad hoc* basis, but practically we will not be able to sustain the HIST major as it is currently configured with the current level of faculty staffing. Unfortunately, uncertainties about faculty replacement make it difficult to engage in comprehensive long-term planning at this particular moment.

Mission Statement for the History Major

A cornerstone of a liberal arts education, history is the study of continuity and change over time. The history major at Wells College helps students acquire an understanding of the richness, diversity, and complexity of the human experience over time and space. As students examine historical questions, they learn how historians have approached and interpreted the past, they gain an appreciation of the contested nature of historical knowledge, and they engage issues that raise ethical questions and provoke historical debate. Students learn to think critically and creatively, as they interpret historical evidence and construct well-reasoned arguments.

Program Goals of the History Major

The HIST major trains students to:

- Think historically by cultivating a sense of change and continuity over time.
- Recognize connections between the past and the present and locate both self and others in time and space.
- Develop an appreciation of difference and diversity by cultivating a sense of shared human experience across time and space.

- Gain knowledge of the past and develop analytical skills that encourage students to become well informed, critical, and active citizens capable of exercising sound judgment.
- Understand historiography and the constructed/interpretative nature of historical scholarship
- Understand the value of conceptual analytical categories such as class, race, gender and ethnicity in historical scholarship.
- Gain a general familiarity with the intellectual, political, economic, social, and cultural history of the United States, Europe, and at least one “Non-Western” area.
- Read critically and evaluate primary and secondary sources.
- Develop research skills that allow students to access, critically evaluate, and use information effectively in composing well-reasoned historical interpretations
- Develop writing skills.
- Develop oral presentation skills.

Outcomes

HIST Students will demonstrate:

- General competence and critical understanding of key events and turning points in the historical areas studied.
- Understanding of the interpretative nature of historical enterprise.
- Ability to think rationally, critically, and analytically about important issues.
- Proficiency in active critical reading, research, and writing skills necessary in historical study.
- Ability to identify and analyze both primary and secondary sources, and cite them correctly in their written work.
- Ability to work both independently and collaboratively on particular problems or questions.
- Proficiency in preparing and delivering clear and well-reasoned oral presentations.

Assessment of Outcomes

Student performance is measured in a variety of ways:

- ***Examinations, quizzes, and spontaneous written responses*** demonstrate analytical and critical thinking skills and students’ mastery of the concepts.
- ***Informal writing exercises, reading reflections, and discussion questions*** generated by students demonstrate students’ engagement with assignments and active critical reading.

- **Position papers, short critical responses, medium-length interpretive essays, and research papers** demonstrate ability to critically evaluate source materials, analyze historical problems, answer historiographical questions, and construct logical arguments.
- **Classroom activities** (e.g., debates, group work, role-playing exercises, and simulations) demonstrate students' ability to understand the significance of historical events, ideas, and personages by assuming various roles or positions.
- **Formal oral presentations and class discussions** demonstrate verbal skills and competence and students' ability to communicate and synthesize material.
- Student performance in **internships** in museums, historical societies, archives, libraries, and schools.
- Student success in **History 375, "Writing History: Theory and Practice."** Required of all history majors and minors, the course trains students to understand history as a discipline and learn the contested nature of history and historical interpretation through the following:
 - An introduction to the methodological problems involved in historical research, criticism, and writing, including the technical issues involved in producing a research paper.
 - A survey that examines the ways the historical profession has evolved over time and connects those changes to the social, political, cultural, and economic contexts of the larger society at particular moments.
 - A critical reflection about the nature of historical enterprise (e.g., How do historians know what they know? What is an historical fact? What counts as evidence? How objective can we be? Can we make moral judgments about the past? What is the function of historical periodization and historical categories? What does it mean when historians disagree about the same evidence?)
 - An introduction to various approaches to the past and to different types of historical writings (e.g., economic, social, cultural or political approaches to the past, the relation between history and myth, history and literature, history and social sciences).
 - Training in the practical issues of research and writing such as defining a topic, organizing material, making arguments, and using evidence. By sharing rough drafts and engaging in peer-editing, students work collaboratively toward creating more polished and more effective essays.
- Senior Experience
 - **HIST 401. Senior Essay:** Senior majors demonstrate skills in addressing historical questions, identifying and accessing sources, conducting research, critically evaluating primary and secondary skills, constructing arguments, and composing

original interpretations in a senior thesis of approximately 30-40 pp. in length. [Fall semester]

- **HIST 402. Senior Seminar:** Senior majors meet regularly with HIST faculty and fellow thesis writers to share ideas, discuss problems, learn about proper citation formats and bibliography, make preliminary presentations, and evaluate students' work through peer-editing. [Fall semester]
- Seniors present their thesis research in a **formal presentation** to the Wells College Community. [Spring semester]
- Seniors complete a written **comprehensive examination** at the end of the spring semester.

Use of Assessment Data

The history faculty will meet at least once each semester to evaluate the following:

- Effectiveness of the current major.
- Effectiveness of lower-level courses in preparing students for advanced work in the major.
- Student performance in upper-level seminars and senior theses to determine how well students have been prepared and supported in their capstone projects.
- Effectiveness of the senior experience (i.e., senior thesis, senior seminar, public presentations, and comprehensive exam)
- Consideration of goals, means of assessment, and new strategies (e.g., student portfolios, tracking of student careers after graduation)
- Course and staffing needs.