

Wells College History Major 2016 Assessment

Executive Statement

During the 2015-2016 academic year, the HIST program included two tenured faculty members and one adjunct. Failure to replace two vacated full-time positions continues to constrain the ability of the program to offer required coursework in nonwestern areas on a consistent basis. The prospect of a new tenure-track position in nonwestern history is very encouraging, and that position would significantly improve the program.

Although staffing constraints have limited the ability of the HIST faculty to engage in comprehensive long-term curricular planning, current faculty continue to assess student learning and the existing HIST curriculum. Faculty have explored new pedagogies and continue to regularize and formalize assessment policies and procedures.

I. Assessment Meetings

The full-time tenured HIST faculty met formally in the fall semester to prepare the program's prioritization report. They met twice at the end of the spring semester and informally at several points throughout the year to assess student progress and program needs.

II. Examination of Assessment Data

Critical reading and the analysis of primary and secondary sources

- All HIST courses require students to demonstrate active critical reading through reading reflections, discussion questions, or short responses in some form. Such tools demonstrate that the majority of students engage critically with readings. However, a minority of students fail to complete such assignments.

Construction of written arguments

- The HIST program remains writing intensive, from short critical responses to interpretive essays and longer research papers. The overwhelming majority of students demonstrate development in their writing skills. A couple of students fail to complete required assignments.

Oral communication

- 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. Professors Koepf and Alexander have enjoyed particular success in simulation gaming. Through participation in these activities most students significantly improve their skills in oral presentation and discussion over the course of the semester.

Original research

- Other than the senior essay, quality of research projects (in those courses which require them) remains mediocre. Despite specific instructions, formal training in research skills, and assistance provided by librarian Lisa Hoff, student bibliographies remain thin and engagement with professional scholarly sources limited. Students continue to rely heavily on the internet, and analysis in most cases remains superficial.

Understanding of the intellectual, political, economic, social, and cultural history of the United States, Europe, and at least one “Non-Western” area

- Quizzes, examinations, and interpretive essays reveal that the overwhelming majority of students demonstrate proficiency in at least one of the geographic areas.

Understanding of historiography and the constructed and interpretative nature of historical scholarship

- Five years ago we re-instated a written comprehensive exam and for the most part it has proven successful. Although this year a few students produced responses that seemed more narrow in scope than we had intended, such exams enable students to demonstrate both content knowledge and an understanding of the nature of historical inquiry. All 8 majors passed their comprehensive exam; 3 passed with distinction. Graduating seniors have expressed appreciation for the opportunity to review their academic career at Wells and reflect more seriously about their educational experience as a whole.

III. Anticipated Program Changes

HIST faculty will formalize rubrics for assessing critical reading responses and consider ways of making students more accountable for missed work (e.g., making such exercises a more significant part of a course grade).

HIST faculty will be even more deliberate and conscious in providing feedback on written work, instructing students in thesis development, training students to read critically, and demonstrating different styles and genres of texts.

HIST faculty will continue to explore ways of assessing student performance in the classroom, including developing rubrics for group activities, role playing exercises, and simulation gaming.

HIST faculty will provide more instruction in oral communication. HIST faculty will formalize rubrics for evaluating student presentations and develop tools to allow students to participate more actively in assessing formal presentations.

HIST faculty will reexamine and revise the wording of several questions on the comprehensive exam so that it will be clear to students that their responses should reflect more broadly on the entirety of their experience in the HIST program.

HIST faculty continue to explore various ways of utilizing student portfolios throughout a student's career, not merely in the senior year. Professor Koepp has been examining materials provided by the American Historical Association and other resources to understand how to use student portfolios most effectively (e.g., as devices that can engage students in critical thinking, as strategies for empowering students to take responsibility for their own learning, and as tools for evaluating the effectiveness of educational programs). We are also working on the practical issues of storage and record keeping; Ed Beck (Ed tech person) has offered to assist us in this area.

IV. Actions for the Upcoming Year and Updated Assessment Plan

Having made preliminary progress in formalizing an assessment plan and bringing assessment procedures closer in line with EPC standards, the HIST faculty will continue to flesh out and develop its working plan, particularly identifying measurement tools, criteria, grading rubrics, and data. HIST faculty are looking specifically at standards, assessment resources, and grading rubrics provided by the American Historical Association.