

Department of History
Presentation on Outcomes Assessment
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Process

Building on discussions since 2009, faculty came to consensus in 2011 on three learning goals for all History majors and all History MA students.

Some faculty volunteered to experiment with rubrics. Others declined, citing academic freedom issues and arguing that the critical-thinking skills taught in History courses cannot be measured, especially not in one semester.

Possible Goals for History Majors:

Students will gain the ability to...

- 1) ...identify the argument or thesis in a work of historical scholarship.
- 2) ...analyze primary sources by correctly identifying the type of source, from when and where it originated, its intended audience, the probable motives of the author, and the author's assumptions and/or biases.
- 3) ...articulate a substantive, contestable, and specific thesis or main claim in their papers.
- 5) ...correctly, honestly, and clearly employ examples (direct quotations and/or paraphrased information) from textual sources or other sources when supporting their thesis and sub-claims, and to arrange these examples logically and effectively.
- 5) ...correctly use citations and to understand what does and does not constitute plagiarism.
- 6) ...speak confidently in public.

!

Possible Goals for History MA Students:

Students will demonstrate the ability to...

7) ...conduct research, including the ability to use library resources, online catalogues, and special collections.

8) ...logically organize and prioritize relevant information when conducting research.

9) ...understand the nature of historical interpretation—that all historical texts are shaped by context, method, and bias; that texts may be internally contradictory and irreducible to a single interpretation; and that the historian's craft includes asking: “what isn't here?”, “what is/was the author's agenda(s)?” and “does *my* point of view inform my reading?”

10) ...do historiography by comparing and contrasting the interpretive interventions of scholars concerned with a shared problem or event, and to situate these interventions in their own historical time period and intellectual context.

11) ...to make their own intervention in a historiographic debate.

Approved Goals for 2012-2014

Students will gain the ability to...

- 1) ...identify the argument or thesis in a work of historical scholarship.
- 2) ...analyze primary sources by correctly identifying the type of source, from when and where it originated, its intended audience, the probable motives of the author, and the author's assumptions and/or biases.
- 3) ...articulate a substantive, contestable, and specific thesis or main claim in their papers and support it with evidence.

Examples of Faculty-designed Rubrics, Preliminary Findings, and Efforts to “Close the Loop”

A. Professor Kate Antonova

B. Professor Peter Conolly-Smith

Peter Conolly-Smith: Primary Source Analysis Rubric

Better than Acceptable (11-9 pts)	Acceptable (8-7 pts)	Less than Acceptable (6 pts or less)
Identified type of document	Y	did not, or did so incorrectly
Identified its source/origin/date	Y	perhaps chose unsuitable material
Identified its probable audience	(not necessary)	most likely did not
Provided basic background/context	Y	did not understand context
Analyzed/interpreted contents	Y, but perhaps not well	essentially misunderstood source
Identified prejudices, if any	tried	unable to discern bias/prejudice
Found meanings unintended by creator and/or ironies	(not necessary)	most likely did not
Displayed basic writing skills	did their best	did their best

Table 1. Spring '10 (40 students total) Fall '10 (48 students total) Spring '11 (49 students total) Fall '12 (50 students total)

	Paper # 1	Paper # 2	Paper # 1	Paper # 2	Paper # 1	Paper # 2	Paper # 1	Paper # 2
Better than Acceptable	22	32	25	38	29	39 Note: 1 student dropped class.	26 Note: 1 student didn't hand in paper	Results not yet in
Acceptable	7	2	16	4	12	5	16	
Not Acceptable	11	8	7	6	8	4	7	

Overall improvement: The following are the number of students who, in ...

Table 2. Spring '10 (40 students total) Fall '10 (48 students total) Spring '11 (49 students total) Fall '12 (50 students total)

Improved		23		29		27		Results not yet in
Stayed the same		4		11		11		
Did worse		4		7		11 <i>Ouch!</i>		

Results

Faculty volunteers reported obtaining valuable information about what their students were learning. They have adjusted their methods based on these findings. The History Department is now involved in a rich and democratic conversation about shared goals that involves the entire department, including those opposed to assessment on principle.

Implications

Devolving power over assessment to faculty can prevent protracted disputes over the perceived creep of standardized testing into higher education. Faculty morale remains high (or at least does not plummet!). A decentralized process creates a forum for debate in which all voices can be heard. Most importantly, students benefit because participating instructors are curious about the outcome of their own unique assessment procedures, not resentful of “outside” interference.