

Department of History

University of Nevada, Reno

Undergraduate History Assessment Plan

Program Mission Statement.

Upon completion of the requirements for the major, the undergraduate student in the Department of History will demonstrate competency in discipline-based content and certain analytical skills in preparation for advanced degrees in graduate and professional schools as well as other history-related careers.

In the spring of 1999, the History Department engaged in a thorough evaluation of the undergraduate course sequence. At that time, the department reviewed all courses in an attempt to map the curriculum in terms of content and its development (e.g. how upper-division courses build upon content first introduced in lower-division courses within respective United States, European, Russian, Asian and Latin American history offerings). In addition, the department also evaluated the curriculum in regards to a specific pre-approved skills set. As a result of the investigation, the department voted to focus on skills development more thoroughly across the curriculum. The department also determined guidelines for skills development for each level in the sequence (see Student Learning Outcomes #2 and #4 below for a listing of the skills). Over the past two years, faculty, instructors (LOAs), and teaching assistants in the History Department have adopted the approved guidelines in their classes.

Student Learning Outcome #1.

Students will have a satisfactory command of historical content material encompassing various regions of the world.

Performance Indicator for Student Learning Outcome #1.

Students must enroll in and pass a number of required courses for the major. In these required courses, students learn the fundamentals as well as in-depth information about the history of the United States, Europe, Russia, Latin America and/or Asia.

Assessment Method for Student Learning Outcome #1.

The Undergraduate Advisor ensures that all students fulfill the requirements for the major. Individual faculty members assess student knowledge of historical content through the examinations and written assignments given in each course. A student who fails a required course must retake that course in order to complete successfully the requirements for the major.

Student Learning Outcome #2

The Faculty of the Department of History conceptualized the skills-based curriculum as a coherent whole composed of segments that build upon and work in conjunction with each other. Therefore, in order to better gauge the effectiveness of this particular curricular approach, the department has elected to assess the skills-based curriculum as a program rather than assess individual parts (with the exception of Learning Outcome #4 listed below).

The skills-based curriculum consists of the following segments:

2a. Students will critically analyze and question primary sources.

- 2b. Students will critically analyze and question secondary sources.
- 2c. Students will write historical analyses.
- 2d. Students will analyze cultural texts such as literature, film, art, etc.
- 2e. Students will research historical subject matter and learn to utilize a variety of bibliographic tools.

Performance Indicator for Student Learning Outcome #2.

All history majors are required in their late sophomore/early junior year to complete successfully the seminar HIST 300, Historical Research and Writing.

In this “gatekeeper” course, students will focus on the analysis of primary and secondary sources and cultural texts, the mechanics of research and the multitude of bibliographic tools at the historian’s disposal, and various forms of historical writing and presentation.

In short, students will be asked to perform the skills set. The seminar is designed to assess student competency in those skills as well as to assess their level of engagement with those skills prior to enrollment in HIST 300.

Assessment Method for Student Learning Outcome #2.

2f. During the first day of class of HIST 300, students will be asked to complete a survey in which they answer a series of questions regarding previously taken history courses.

The survey will ask students to comment on their experience and knowledge regarding the skills set in those courses. These results will be carefully reviewed as a measure of the effectiveness of lower-division history courses in regards to the presentation of the skills set at that particular level.

2g. In History 300, students produce a substantial amount of written work. The culminating student project is a sizeable research paper. The faculty member in charge

of the seminar will assess this final research project using standard guidelines determined by the department.

Student Learning Outcome #3.

Students will acquire competency in historical subject matter and in the pre-selected skills set.

Performance Indicator for Learning Outcome #3.

In their senior year, students enroll in HIST 499, the senior thesis/project seminar.

Students, in conjunction with a faculty member of their choice, will engage in intensive research on a pre-approved topic. A senior thesis/project must demonstrate command of the designated skills as well as the subject matter under analysis.

Assessment Method for Student Learning Outcome #3.

3a. Individual faculty will assess the student's command of the subject matter and skills through the assignment of a grade.

3b. A committee of instructors (not serving as thesis advisors) will review a sample of senior theses/projects (in an anonymous format) and will assess skills competency utilizing a standard rubric designed by the department. The results will be tabulated and reported to the department for further action.

Student Learning Outcome #4.

Students will engage in oral participation and presentation of research analyses.

Performance Indicator for Learning Outcome #4.

Students are required to present their completed senior thesis/project research in a formal public presentation (the Senior Thesis/Project Colloquium) before faculty and other interested students.

Assessment Method for Student Learning Outcome #4.

Faculty in attendance will be asked to fill out an assessment sheet for each student presenting a thesis. This form will ask faculty to rate students regarding clarity and organization of the presentation, delivery, and command of subject matter under question. The ratings will be tabulated and reported to the department for further consideration.

Student Learning Outcome #5.

Students will acquire competency in historical subject matter and in the pre-determined skills set.

Performance Indicator for Learning Outcome #5.

History alumni will be asked to respond to a series of specific questions regarding the aforementioned learning outcomes and mission statement.

Assessment Method for Student Learning Outcome #5.

The department will tabulate alumni response and report on the results.

Use of Results.

For the last four years, the department has been actively engaged in evaluating and improving its undergraduate curriculum. We anticipate that History 300 will serve as a benchmark for both the curriculum and for student assessment. It will allow the department to evaluate the implementation of the skills-based curriculum at the introductory level and enhance student experience and expertise with those skills in a small classroom setting. The senior thesis/project is the culminating performance indicator. With the completion of the thesis/project and the public presentation of the research, students should have perfected the skills necessary for successful careers at graduate and professional schools, and careers affiliated with history, law, international affairs, or public relations. All of the assessment information will be collected and forwarded to the departmental administrative assistant. The chair of the department will present the assessment results to the department on a bi-annual basis. The department as a body will then make recommendations as necessary and charge the undergraduate curriculum committee with formulating formal suggestions to be voted upon and implemented in the subsequent academic year.

Implementation Plan.

The senior thesis, History 499, and the seminar on Historical Research and Writing, History 300, have been submitted and approved and will be included in the next university catalogue. The senior thesis/project seminar is offered Fall 2002. Presently 12 students are enrolled and are engaged in research. The end of Fall 2002 will inaugurate the Senior Thesis/Project Colloquium as these students present their research in public.

History 300 will be offered for the first time in Spring 2003. The department is currently formulating the survey and assessment rubrics for the senior theses/projects, History 300, and the colloquium. Our first preliminary data set for the undergraduate curriculum should be available for review during the summer of 2003. Alumni data should also be forthcoming from the University Assessment Office by that date. The department chair, undergraduate advisor, the various instructors of History 300, faculty mentors of senior theses/projects, and the members of the undergraduate curriculum committee will share the responsibilities of the assessment plan.

History Major Standards Level 16; Department of History, University of Nevada Reno

History majors graduating from UNR should be able to understand the how historical knowledge is gathered and how professional historians analyze and present that knowledge. Student should understand the nature of evidence and the practices of argument within the discipline. They should be aware of the existence of historiographical debate and know examples of this. They should understand that there are different methodological approaches to history and be familiar with some examples of those different approaches. Students should be aware of the problematic nature of claims to objectivity in historical writing.

Specifically students should be able to:

Critically evaluate secondary sources and be aware of the historiographical nature of these sources;

Critically analyze cultural texts;

Engage in historical research which synthesizes/integrates the aforementioned sources;

Write a well crafted research essay/paper of some length that incorporates the analysis of a variety of sources/texts;

Formally present the analysis of a text or research project either individually or in a group; and

Effectively utilize major bibliographic and research engines on the internet as well as standard library sources.