

Assessment Report - History (BA, BS, BS with Emphasis in Secondary Education, Minor)

OVERVIEW

This marks the first implementation of the assessment plan approved by the history faculty during the 2020-2021 Academic Year and submitted in lieu of an assessment report in June 2021. This narrative report provides both an assessment of the history program and an evaluation and recommended revisions to the assessment plan as it stands.

The assessment plan identifies five program Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) that are to be assessed on a rotating schedule. For AY 2021-2022, SLOs 2 and 4 are due for assessment:

- Demonstrate understanding of the history of historical writing, and demonstrate the ability to apply the principles and theories that support historical writing
- Apply the concepts of historical thinking, for example, in evaluating change over time

While the assessment plan has not been fulfilled as written for reasons outlined below, as History Program Coordinator, I have completed the assessment of these objectives as best I could by reviewing the eleven completed finals assignments of students taking HIST 493 - Seminar in Fall 2021 (Prof Jonathan Rees) and Spring 2022 (Prof Judy Gaughan).

ASSESSMENT

- Demonstrate understanding of the history of historical writing, and demonstrate the ability to apply the principles and theories that support historical writing

None of the reviewed papers explicitly addressed the concept of historiography (the history of history), however all eleven demonstrated proper differentiation between primary and secondary sources (those created by persons with firsthand knowledge of the events described and those created by others). Further, all eleven made correct use of documentation principles, though there were a few errors in application. I therefore assess that the students completing the major programs in this academic year have largely met this SLO.

At this time, the history program does not include a class specific to historiography. Instead, the historiography of particular topics is taught as part of each upper division class. It is therefore not surprising that the final products of the senior seminars do not emphasize historiography. Further, none of the faculty currently teaching upper division courses at CSUP are particularly theory-driven in their teaching or research. This SLO might need revision to better reflect the goals of the program, though involvement with historiography and theory might be better demonstrated by a switch to a portfolio approach (see below).

- Apply the concepts of historical thinking, for example, in evaluating change over time

All of the eleven papers evaluated showed understanding of the concept of change over time. This understanding extended beyond simple chronology to identify cause and effect.

While the SLO identifies evaluating change over time as a key concept of historical thinking, others include identification and evaluation of agency, and assigning relative weight to multiple causes. This SLO might need revision, or at least explication, to make it clear that change over time is only one important concept of historical thinking.

EVALUATION OF THE ASSESSMENT PLAN

As Napoleon Bonaparte is frequently quoted as saying, “You may ask me for anything you like except time.” It was time, or rather the lack thereof, that derailed the assessment plan as written. The assessment plan required two intermediate steps to be completed during the 2021-22 academic year. Neither was.

First, we were supposed to implement portfolios for all history majors and minors by April 2022. The idea behind the portfolios was to allow the faculty to evaluate progress of students toward the SLOs, rather than simply giving a thumbs up or thumbs down based on their performance in HIST 493. Further, implementing portfolios would also allow us to evaluate the effectiveness of the history minor program, whose students rarely if ever take HIST 493.

While I made several attempts to learn how the portfolio system in Blackboard works, or to develop an alternative plan for collecting portfolio materials, I never found the time to do so. Therefore when it came time to run the assessment, I had to fall back on using the HIST 493 papers, an inadequate substitute.

Second, we were supposed to design SLO evaluation rubrics for use in the assessment process. I made one effort to poll the faculty for rubric ideas, but again the task fell by the wayside in the press of other business. I therefore made a subjective evaluation of the two SLOs assessed this year.

Finally, this assessment was supposed to be conducted by a committee representing not less than 2/3 of the tenured or tenure-track historians - three, given our current faculty. No faculty members responded to a request to serve on the assessment committee. This had two possible reasons. First, the request came at the end of the semester and could well have been buried in the grading and other necessary tasks. Second, and more importantly, the assessment plan calls for the assessment to cover the Fall and Spring semesters of an academic year and therefore the assessment process must take place for the most part during the summer when faculty are not on contract (except for the Chair). Given the failure of the university to prioritize pay equity and pay increases to keep up with the cost of living it is entirely unreasonable to expect faculty to work when off contract.

The failures in implementation of the existing assessment plan must be corrected in AY 2022-2023, before the next assessment report is due. The following issues will be discussed by the faculty at our next gathering:

1. Establishing rubrics for evaluating SLOs
2. Developing an understanding of the Blackboard portfolio system or an alternative arrangement

Further, the following administrative changes will be discussed:

1. Should the position of History Program Coordinator be separated from the position of Department Chair?
2. Should the assessment plan be modified to allow completion of the assessment prior to the beginning of the summer break?
3. Should members of the assessment committee be compensated for their time outside of their normal contract obligations?

This assessment has been completed by Prof Grant Weller, Chair, Department of History, Political Science, Philosophy, and Geography, and is submitted on 7 June 2022.