

Department of History, Political Science, Philosophy, and Geography History Program Assessment Plan

Under new leadership, the History Department is making structural changes. This allows its members not only to rethink the student experience, but to change its assessment plan into something that is both workable and useful.

The most important change is the decision to offer our capstone seminar only in the Fall semester. The result of that course is a research paper, designed to be the capstone experience of the major. Assessment will begin there and move backwards. More on that in a moment.

Here are the Student Learning Outcomes that we will be assessing (The American Historical Association's History Tuning Project, specifically the 2016 History Discipline Core; and CSUP's Vision 2028, specifically the Guiding Principles):

1. Demonstrate effective writing skills. [AHA 5a, 5b; CSUP Develop People, Transform Learning]
2. Demonstrate knowledge of specific historical content, including times and locations studied, and knowledge of the complexities of the past and the diversity of human cultures in those times and places [AHA 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 2d, 3b, 5a, 5b; CSUP Engage Place, Build Knowledge]
3. Apply the concepts of historical thinking, for example, in evaluating change over time [AHA 3a, 6a, 4c; CSUP Live Sustainably, Impact Society]
4. Demonstrate skills in historical research, including historical analysis and interpretation [AHA 2b, 2c, 3c, 3d, 6b; CSUP Empower Students]

Because of the importance of writing to our discipline, we will review criteria 1 every year. We will review the other three yearly on a rotating basis. Of course, good historical writing includes all of the other three criteria so we'll really be focusing on one part of the same criteria each year.

Process:

The process will begin when the professor who taught seminar turns in their grades. They will offer the department a brief, written report on how their seminar students performed on criteria 1 and whichever of the three other criteria the department is considering that year in an electronic forum accessible to all department members. All teachers in the department will be encouraged to respond to that report based on their experience in those classes.

During the first half of the second semester, each tenured faculty member will send the coordinator an email evaluating papers from at least one of their first semester courses. Are the advanced students they taught writing well? How did the advanced students do on the other criteria related to writing that we are reviewing that year? Those reports should include digital copies of at least three graded papers (good and bad) in order to supplement the coordinator's

report. These faculty members should include best measure of the pass rate on the paper assignments in their advanced class (or classes) as a whole.

Approximately halfway through the spring semester, the history coordinator (or Department Chair if one in the same) will write up that year's assessment report, with examples, based upon the department conversation and the reports they received from tenure track faculty. While doing so, they will continue that electronic conversation by looking back on last year's report and asking the department about how they've changed their teaching based on previous assessments and whether or not they feel that has helped.

This assessment plan will be reviewed and approved by the tenured and tenure-track history faculty at a minimum every four years.

References: <https://www.csupueblo.edu/vision2028/index.html>

<https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/tuning-the-history-discipline/2016-history-discipline-core>

Measurement:

The standards for success are going to have to be reviewed early because we currently have no idea how we're doing because of the lack of successful assessment in recent years. It also doesn't help that writing skills are subjective – not arbitrary, but subjective. We'll begin with the basic premise that any student that makes it to the senior seminar should be able to get through it with a passing grade of "C," no matter which tenure-track instructor has that course in that particular year. Of course, there are other factors (like personal ones) that might prevent a soon-to-graduate major from passing seminar, but since you can't write a passing seminar paper without good writing skills, we'll set a target of 90% getting a "C" or better. [If this proves too easy to make we will consider raising the grade standard when we review this new system after year #1.]

With respect to earlier classes, we'll rely on the reports coming in from tenure track faculty. Our beginning criterion will be a 75% success rate in those classes meaning that the relevant papers are a "C" or better). The other effect of these discussions will be to get the department's grading criteria more aligned. While no two history professors will have the same definition of what good writing is, these discussions will improve student performance by helping us push a common message.

Cycle:

We will return to evaluate this model every year for the first three years after implementation. While processes might change, it is most likely that we will change our targets because those are very difficult to set without data based upon prior performance.