

California State University, Stanislaus

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT PLAN

PROGRAM NAME: History

COLLEGE YEAR: AY 2008-09

PROVISIONAL ACTION PLAN:

To assess the impact of increasingly scarce resources on the established success of the History Major.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE/OUTCOME OR OTHER FOCUS OF STUDENT LEARNING (EXPLAIN):

Use of Primary Sources

Use of Secondary Sources

As the American Historical Association notes:

Studying history as a discipline requires one to engage one's mind with the facts, ideas, and interpretations conveyed or suggested by historical evidence, to give contexts to discrete pieces of evidence, and to devise plausible explanations and judgments based on the evidence. Such engagement compels one to sift, sort, and arrange what one sees in ways that help one make sense of it. The discipline of history equips one to extend facts, ideas, and interpretations into new realms. One must weigh the validity of arguments, assess the soundness of historical judgments, and otherwise practice the art of critical thinking characteristic of discerning minds.

("Liberal Learning and the History Major," at <http://www.historians.org/PUBS/Free/LiberalLearning.htm>)

METHOD OR APPROACH TO ASSESSING ABOVE STUDENT LEARNING (EXPLAIN):

INDIRECT METHODS: Continue to evaluate Senior Seminar students for appropriate use of primary and secondary sources.

Instructors in HIST 4960 Senior Seminar will analyze all of the students' final papers, and their aptitude in utilizing appropriate research sources will be rated as Advanced (the highest category), Proficient, Essential, and Unacceptable. The Program Assessment Coordinator will collect, analyze, and store the results.

DIRECT METHODS:

- **Continue to evaluate incoming undergraduate majors and graduating seniors on the skill set we emphasize in the History Major.**

Professors will hand the same set of questions regarding the skill set in History to their advisees, polling them at entry to the program, and as they arrived to get signatures on their graduation forms. The first two skills listed are those emphasized here. The Program Assessment Coordinator will collect, analyze, and store the results.

- **Continue to evaluate incoming majors and graduating seniors as they arrive for counseling in the department on preparation in and interest in six major geographical areas.**

Each incoming undergraduate major, when he/she arrives for counseling with an assigned professor in the History Department, will be given a questionnaire to gauge student preparation and interest in the six major world geographical areas. The Program Assessment Coordinator will collect, analyze, and store the results.

RESOURCES NEEDED:

- 1. Continuing support of university for assessment professionalizing and PAC interaction.**
- 2. Beginning in AY 2009-2010, we need a professor specializing in the Ancient Near Eastern History as the one history professor in that area of specialization has found another position.**
- 3. We also need an African History professor to fill a lack which has existed for the last two years.**
- 4. An additional librarian to ensure that the course "Research and Information Literacy" can continue to be offered, a course found to be of significant impact in the appropriate utilization of primary and secondary sources by History Majors (see "Program Assessment Annual Update for AY 2008-2009").**

PROCESS, TIMELINE, RESPONSIBLE PARTIES, AND RESOURCES NEEDED FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND COMPLETION OF PLAN:

We will continue assessment as we have in the past (as exhaustively explained in the "Program Assessment Annual Update for AY 2008-2009").

- **Direct assessment is facilitated by all professors acting as counselors in the academic major.**
- **Those who instruct HIST 4960 Senior Seminar (which rotates every semester) perform the indirect assessment.**
- **Librarians have, in the past, offered a class in Research and Information Literacy, a prerequisite and valuable contribution to our major.**

We are increasingly short of resources.

- **We are particularly concerned with the pedagogical impact of being unable to cover two important geographical areas in world history.**
- **The possible loss of the Research and Information Literacy class is expected to have a negative impact on students' skills acquisition.**

We need to see how these deficits affect our students' success, as measured both directly and indirectly, in order to try to formulate the best way to address them. Assessment will be ongoing as long as the PAC has the support to do it.

INDIRECT ASSESSMENT – STUDENT SKILLS

Based on the indirect assessment data gathered this academic year, History Majors in the ultimate or penultimate semester of their baccalaureate degree have met with variable success in the *appropriate use of primary and secondary sources*.

We have analyzed the outcomes of the Senior Seminar classes (HIST 4960) in AY 2008-2009, a total of 48 students, composed of one section of 22 students in the fall, and two sections, of 14 and 12 students, respectively, in the Spring.

All of the students' final papers were analyzed by the instructors, and their aptitude in *utilizing appropriate research sources* rated as Advanced (the highest category), Proficient, Essential, and Unacceptable. Of the students enrolled in these classes, the final results were:

Advanced: 6

Proficient: 21

Essential: 12

Unacceptable: 9

Of the unacceptable, at least four of the students either formally withdrew or informally disappeared from the classes, meaning that, of those who actually completed the course, five did unacceptable work.

Professors' observations regarding *use of sources*:

- Most of the student falling into the “unacceptable” category had not previously completed the course, MDIS 3005 Research and Information Literacy. (In the past, we have always required that they do so. This year, in light of pressure to accommodate more students, we waived the requirement. This decision appears to have not been in the best interest of the students, despite certain student pleas to the contrary.)
- Several students expressed the need for a longer timeline to complete a senior thesis, some saying that they wished they had taken Individual Study in their chosen area previously. However, among the more successful students, some built on research conducted in an earlier class, augmenting it with additional research and analysis to create a senior thesis.
- Students who conducted research at a major research library (such as at Berkeley or Stanford) tended to perform better on senior thesis.
- The physical setting for the class had an affect on student research, particularly the reliable availability of computers.

Other observations:

- The number of students makes a tremendous difference in student performance. Smaller classes tended to have fewer students performing at lower levels.
- Students generally needed a strengthened sense of the purpose and value of historiography.
- Some students found it difficult to write objectively rather than with bias.

ANALYSIS

Students demonstrate room for improvement in utilizing appropriate sources in Senior Seminar. In the past, we have enjoyed significant cooperation with the Library in promoting this skill. Originally (extending back to AY 2006-2007), our plan, mutually agreed upon by the History Department and the Library, was to adjust the class (currently MDIS 3005) Research and Information Literacy – a History Major prerequisite taught by Library faculty for over twenty years - to meet perceived needs identified through History Department assessment (above). However, university restructuring, staffing issues and a deteriorating budget have made this solution problematic. At an April 29 meeting between History professors and Library faculty and administrators, we discussed this challenge. While the Library is willing to continue MDIS 3005 in the next academic year, the number of sections is being cut, making it more difficult for our majors to enroll in a timely fashion. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that the classes will continue after that. (Since we had this meeting, the budget has further deteriorated.) Consequently, the method for improving student skills in the appropriate use of primary and secondary sources remains under discussion.

ASSESSMENT REPORT ON THE UNDERGRADUATE HISTORY MAJOR AY 2008-2009 DIRECT ASSESSMENT

A major focus in AY 2008-2009 has been to assess undergraduate student interest in and knowledge of the six major global geographical areas emphasized in our newly-reconfigured major, revised in our regular, monthly department meetings in AY 2007-2008. We have discussed the most effective ways to deliver the major in our regular, monthly department meetings in AY 2008-2009. The nature of our student body has been a particular concern, echoing the observations of the American Historical Association, “The requirements of the major must be flexible enough to allow faculties to address specific student interests. This is particularly true as adult students increasingly populate college classrooms.”¹ In AY 2008-2009 we have used direct assessment to gauge student preparation and interest in the six major world geographical areas. Each incoming undergraduate major, when he/she arrived for counseling with an assigned professor in the History Department, was given a questionnaire. The Program Assessment Coordinator has collected, analyzed, and stored the results.

Measuring scale: 1 (slim to none); 2 (below average); 3 (above average); 4 (considerable)

¹ The American Historical Association, “Liberal Learning and the History Major,” at <http://www.historians.org/PUBS/Free/LiberalLearning.htm>.

Geographical area	Knowledge at entry	Interest at entry
Africa	1.76	2.38
Asia	2.19	2.42
Europe	3.34	3.65
Latin America	2.11	2.84
Middle East	2.15	3.07
United States	3.65	3.53

ANALYSIS

Undergraduate students at entry have the highest interest in learning about Europe, the United States, and the Middle East, respectively. However, they have relatively low knowledge of the Middle East compared to the other two most popular areas. It should also be noted that the History Department currently employs two professors of European History, and four of United States History (in part because of the state requirement for U.S. History for Teacher Education). However, in AY 2009-2010, we have no specialist in Middle Eastern history due to the fact that our single expert has accepted another job.

Students also note the most serious lack of knowledge about Africa. We are currently unable to remedy this lack, due to the fact that, since the retirement of our lone African History professor in 2007, we have been unable to fill this position.

IN SUMMARY

NATURE OF CHALLENGE	RESOURCES NEEDED
All majors should have opportunity to take courses in Middle Eastern history (the second of four non-western fields; two required)	Middle Eastern history professor
All majors should have opportunity to take courses in African history (one of four non-western fields; two required)	African history professor
We need to offer additional opportunities to take the course on Research and Information Literacy - a History major PREREQUISITE	Additional Library faculty

Without these resources, we cannot deliver our complete program in its current form.