

History Department Assessment Report – Academic Year 2019-2020

Description of assessment process

For the 2019-2020 academic year the History Department assessed two learning outcomes drawn from its overall plan. These were learning objectives two and four. Learning objective two addressed students' ability to analyze, interpret and assess historiographic arguments found in secondary sources. For the assignment discussed here, students read a series of sources that addressed the same topic (examples included the Counterculture, the Vietnam War, and the Protestant Reformation.). They then evaluated these sources for the strength of their arguments, the methodologies used by the authors, and differences between interpretations on the same topic or theme. Learning objective four addressed students' ability to write clearly and coherently, and assessed the extent to which students had mastered the mechanics of historical writing (for example, the way in which historians present findings and conclusions).

The Department assesses objective two because the ability to effectively identify and assess historical arguments is an essential attribute for historians. Moreover, it serves as a way to introduce majors to the methodology used to create an original historical account, as historical arguments build on the work of other historians' interpretations. Objective four was created because history is a written medium, and the ability to write well is an important goal not only for a historian, but also for a productive citizen and educated individual. Moreover, history writing follows particular conventions that require practice and repetition to master, and the department deemed it important to assess students' aptitude in this area as they progress through the major.

A rubric was created for each of these learning outcomes (please see Figures 1 and 2). The rubric used for learning outcome two analyzed students' ability to do the following in regard to analysis of secondary sources: identify a historical argument; compare different historical arguments on the same topic; critique an author's methodology and argument; read a historical source thoroughly. The rubric used for learning outcome four assessed students' ability to write clearly and coherently, to use proper mechanics and grammar, and to identify how historians organize and present ideas.

The process used to assess these objectives was through blind review of student work by History Department faculty members. All history majors must take the course HIS 210 (Craft of History); the primary assessment in this class calls for students to write a

“historiography paper” in which they read and analyze arguments and conclusions found in multiple historical monographs that address the same topic. The historiography papers from this course were collected and anonymously evaluated by the Department’s assessment subcommittee. Each paper was read and evaluated using the two rubrics discussed above. For the analysis here, 48 historiography papers were evaluated. This represents approximately half the students who took HIS 210 in the 2018-2019 academic year. The rubrics used a scale with assessment categories labeled ‘Exemplary,’ “Adequate,” “Minimal,” and “Attempted”. Each of these categories was in turn given a numerical value with Exemplary equating to a 4, Adequate to a 3, Minimal to a 2, and Attempted to a 1. These ratings were used to create the data used here and to make conclusions based on this data. Note that data were analyzed both by the cohort as a whole (Figures 3 and 4) as well as by individual student (Figures 5, 9, and 10).

Analysis of findings

The data collected and analyzed suggest the following conclusions. First, the majority of students performed in the “adequate” range for both learning objectives, with mean scores falling generally within the 3.0 range. Approximately 30% of students scored in the exemplary range and 10% of students scored in the minimal range on each of the two rubrics. For learning objective 2, the following conclusions emerged in the data, which were consistent across all the assessment categories. Thirty percent of the students scored at exemplary in each of the five areas; an analysis of the individual rankings suggests that the same sample of students submitted strong work and scored highly in all the categories, with 16 students (33%) achieving a mean of 3.5 or above for this learning objective. There was wider distribution in the “adequate” area for this objective, with scores ranging from 50% to 64% in the various assessment categories. An analysis of individual student performance reveals that approximately half the students (45%) had a mean average between 3.0 and 3.4 for the categories in this rubric. 20% of students were below 3.0 in their overall mean scores, indicating that one-fifth of the students analyzed in this sample scored below average on this rubric. Two areas of weakness (as reflected in mean scores and number of students scoring below average) were the category that asked students to identify the argument in a secondary source and the category that assessed careful reading of the sources. The data for learning objective 4 falls with similar ranges, although there was wider variation across the rubric categories. For example, only 27% of students scored in the exemplary range in the rubric category that assesses history writing conventions (in other words, how well the students wrote in the style of a historian). This category only had a mean average of 3.0. Similarly, the rubric category that assessed students’ ability to write clearly only had a mean score of 3.08. In terms of overall student performance, there

were two fewer students at 3.5 or above (14 vs. 16) in average scores across the categories, and one more student (11 vs. 10) who averaged below 2.0. Considering both categories, a few trends emerge in the data. The highest overall mean score was 3.29, in the category that assesses logic and flow of writing (suggesting these assignments were organized properly); this was followed by 3.23 in the category that assesses the ability to distinguish between arguments found in different sources that discuss the same topic. The lowest overall score was 3.0 in the category that assessed students' ability to write like historians. Students also scored lower in the category that assessed the coherence and quality of their writing (3.08). One anomaly in the data is that more students scored highly in the category that assessed their ability to distinguish between different types of arguments on the same topic than they did in the category that asked them to identify the argument found in a specific secondary source. This reflects a movement of six students who scored better in the second category than they did in the first. Logic would suggest that the scores in these two areas should be consistent, but this might indicate that students are doing a better job identifying differences between two conclusions than they are about summarizing and paraphrasing a historian's argument. Overall, however, there was consistency in the data and the rubric categories fell within similar ranges of one another. This is suggested by the low standard deviation of the mean scores of all ten assessment categories, which is .083.

Action
plan

Analysis of the data present here has led the department to consider the following:

[1] Students possess some weaknesses in their writing ability, particularly the ability to write in the manner of historians. While the data suggests that students are able to read history effectively, more attention needs to be paid to writing in the manner and style of historians.

[2] The data here suggests that most students are performing in acceptable ranges, but approximately 20% could be categorized as low achievers based on their performance on this assignment. It is in the department's best interest to identify these individuals and provide them with proper advisement and support early in their academic careers. This information is also important for us as we develop our HIS 099 curriculum. It is also evident that approximately 25% of the sample assessed here could be characterized as high achievers and are demonstrating sophisticated thinking even at an early point in the major.

[3] Comparison of the data from this sample with the previous iteration of this

assessment cycle in 2017 (see figures 6 and 7) suggests nearly identical performance across the various rubric categories, a conclusion confirmed by the extremely low standard deviations across the two data sets. This suggests that the department continues to do some things well and that most students continue to perform within acceptable ranges. However, what can be done to improve student performance in certain areas such as writing ability and reading effectively? Based on analysis of a significant sample of data, it is evident that certain weaknesses continue to manifest themselves, and these concerns need to be addressed by the department moving forward.

Figure 1. Learning Objective 2 – Secondary Sources

Exemplary Adequate Minimal Attempted

Ability to identify a historical argument in a secondary source

Paper displays some ability to identify a historical argument, but more careful reading was required

Paper's discussion of historical arguments found in secondary sources was weak and ineffectual
 Paper's discussion of historical arguments found in secondary sources was weak and ineffectual
 Paper's discussion of historical arguments found in secondary sources was weak and ineffectual
 Paper's discussion of historical arguments found in secondary sources was weak and ineffectual

Paper displays acceptable ability to identify and summarize historical arguments found in secondary sources
 Paper displays acceptable ability to identify and summarize historical arguments found in secondary sources

Paper displays some ability to identify a historical argument, but more careful reading was required

Paper displays some ability to identify a historical argument, but more careful reading was required
 Paper displays ability to identify contrasting historical interpretations and

Ability to distinguish between arguments found in secondary sources that address the same topic

				read and the arguments found in them
Paper displays some ability to identify contrasting arguments in different secondary sources			Ability to critique arguments in secondary sources	
Paper displays some ability to identify contrasting arguments in different secondary sources	Paper displays strong ability to question author's thesis and effectively evaluates his or her claims			
Paper displays a limited ability to distinguish arguments found in different secondary sources		Paper provides some evidence that author's thesis was evaluated, but more detail was needed		
Paper displays a limited ability to distinguish arguments found in different secondary sources		Paper provides some evidence that author's thesis was evaluated, but more detail was needed		
Paper displays a limited ability to distinguish arguments found in different secondary sources			Paper tentatively identifies and questions a historical argument	
	Paper displays weak knowledge of the texts that were read and the arguments found in them		Paper tentatively identifies and questions a historical argument	
	Paper displays weak knowledge of the texts that were read and the arguments found in them			Does not effectively question the author's thesis
	Paper displays weak knowledge of the texts that were read and the arguments found in them			Does not effectively question the author's thesis
	Paper displays weak knowledge of the texts that were read and the arguments found in them			Does not effectively question the author's thesis
	Paper displays weak knowledge of the texts that were read and the arguments found in them			Does not effectively question the author's thesis

Ability to recognize
and analyze
author's
methodology

Ability to read
historical sources
carefully and
thoroughly

Paper displays a
careful and
thorough reading of
the sources
analyzed and read

Paper displays
adequate knowledge
of sources that were
read
Paper displays
adequate knowledge
of sources that were
read

Paper displays
some familiarity
with author's
methodology and
use of sources
Paper displays
some familiarity
with author's
methodology and
use of sources

Paper displays
some knowledge of
sources that were
read
Paper displays
some knowledge of
sources that were
read
Paper displays
some knowledge of
sources that were
read

Paper displays
imperfect
familiarity with
author's
methodology
Paper displays
imperfect
familiarity with
author's
methodology
Paper displays
imperfect
familiarity with
author's
methodology

Paper displays
weak and
incomplete
knowledge of
sources
Paper displays
weak and
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sources
Paper displays
weak and
incomplete
knowledge of
sources

Paper displays little
to no familiarity with
author's
methodology
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to no familiarity with
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to no familiarity with
author's
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Paper displays little
to no familiarity with
author's
methodology

Figure 2. Learning Objective 4 – Writing

grammar errors

Paper contains a number of spelling and grammar errors that undermines its argument and clarity
Paper contains a number of spelling and grammar errors that undermines its argument and clarity
Paper contains a number of spelling and grammar errors that undermines its argument and clarity

generally well written
Ideas and conclusions are generally well written

Ideas and conclusions lack coherence and more clarity is required
Ideas and conclusions lack coherence and more clarity is required
Ideas and conclusions lack coherence and more clarity is required

Paper contains numerous spelling, grammar and syntax errors that reflect a lack of care and effort
Paper contains numerous spelling, grammar and syntax errors that reflect a lack of care and effort
Paper contains numerous spelling, grammar and syntax errors that reflect a lack of care and effort
Paper contains numerous spelling, grammar and syntax errors that reflect a lack of care and effort

Paper's conclusions are not well stated or expressed clearly
Paper's conclusions are not well stated or expressed clearly
Paper's conclusions are not well stated or expressed clearly
Paper's conclusions are not well stated or expressed clearly

History writing conventions

Paper reflects strong knowledge and familiarity with how historians organize ideas and write effectively

Ability to state ideas and conclusions

Paper reflects understanding of the conventions of historical writing
Paper reflects understanding of the conventions of historical writing

Ideas and conclusions are

Paper reflects some understanding with

the conventions of
historical writing
Paper reflects some
understanding with
the conventions of
historical writing
Paper reflects some
understanding with
the conventions of
historical writing

Paper demonstrates
a lack of familiarity
with the
characteristics of
historical writing
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a lack of familiarity
with the
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historical writing
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characteristics of
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with the
characteristics of
historical writing

Figure 3. Learning Objective 2 – Secondary Sources (All students N=48)

Exemplary Adequate Minimal Attempted Mean

Ability to identify a historical argument in a secondary source

14 25 6 3 3.04

Ability to distinguish between arguments found in secondary sources that address the same topic

14 31 3 3 3.23

Ability to critique arguments in secondary sources

15 26 5 2 3.13

Ability to recognize and analyze author's methodology

14 27 7 3 3.15

Ability to read historical sources carefully and thoroughly

15 25 6 2 3.10

Figure 4. Learning Objective 4 – Writing Ability (All students N=48)

Exemplary Adequate Minimal Attempted Mean

Coherence and quality of writing 19 22 3 3.08

Logic and flow of writing 16 30 2 3.29

Grammar, mechanics and spelling 14 30 4 3.20

Ability to state ideas and conclusions 14 32 2 3.16

History writing conventions 11 27 9 1 3.0

Figure 5 – Individual Student Ratings Sorted by Average (4.0 scale) Individual student rating range – secondary sources (N=48)

Individual student rating range – writing ability (N=48) Number of students 3.5-4.0 16 3.5-4.0 14 3.4-3.5 10 3.3-3.4 10 3.2-3.3 10 3.1-3.2 10 3.0-3.1 10 2.9-3.0 10 2.8-2.9 10 2.7-2.8 10 2.6-2.7 10 2.5-2.6 10 2.4-2.5 10 2.3-2.4 10 2.2-2.3 10 2.1-2.2 10 2.0-2.1 10 1.9-2.0 10 1.8-1.9 10 1.7-1.8 10 1.6-1.7 10 1.5-1.6 10 1.4-1.5 10 1.3-1.4 10 1.2-1.3 10 1.1-1.2 10 1.0-1.1 10 0.9-1.0 10 0.8-0.9 10 0.7-0.8 10 0.6-0.7 10 0.5-0.6 10 0.4-0.5 10 0.3-0.4 10 0.2-0.3 10 0.1-0.2 10 0.0-0.1 10

2.0

0

Figure 6 – Comparison of student performance, Learning Objective 2 Category 2017 mean
(N=60)
2020 mean (N=48)

3.1	3.04	.03	Standard deviation Ability to identify a historical argument in a se
Ability to distinguish between arguments found in secondary sources that address the same topic			
3.23	3.23	0	
Ability to critique arguments in secondary sources			
3.1	3.13	.015	
Ability to recognize and analyze author's methodology			
2.85	3.15	.015	
Ability to read historical sources carefully and thoroughly			
3.18	3.10	.05	

Figure 7 – Comparison of student performance, Learning Objective 4 Category 2017 mean
(N=60)
2020 mean (N=48)

3.0	3.08	.04	Standard deviation Coherence and c
Logic and flow of writing 3.13 3.29 .08 Grammar, mechanics and spelling			
3.0	3.12	.06	
Ability to state ideas and conclusions			
3.23	3.16	.035	
History writing conventions 3.05 3.0 .025			

Figure 8 – Learning Objective 2

Figure 9 – Learning Objective 4

Ability to identify a historical argument in a secondary source		author's methodology Ability to analyze an author's methodology	Ability to read historical sources carefully and thoroughly Ability to read historical sources carefully and thoroughly Ability to read historical sources carefully and thoroughly Ability to read historical sources carefully and thoroughly Ability to read historical sources carefully and thoroughly Ability to read historical sources carefully and thoroughly
Ability to analyze an author's methodology Ability to analyze an author's methodology Ability to analyze an author's methodology Ability to analyze an author's methodology	Average		
Ability to critique arguments Ability to critique arguments Ability to critique arguments Ability to critique arguments Ability to critique arguments Ability to critique arguments			

1 4 3 4 4 4 3.8
2 3 3 4 4 4 3.6
3 3 3 3 3 3
4 3 3 3 3 3
5 3 3 3 3 3
6 2 3 2 3 3 2.6
7 4 4 4 4 4
8 4 4 3 3 3 3.4
9 2 2 2 2 2 3
10 3 3 3 3 3 4
11 2 3 3 3 3 2.8
12 3 3 3 3 3
13 3 2 3 2 2 2.4
14 3 3 3 3 3
15 4 4 4 4 3 3.8
16 4 3 4 4 4 3.8
17 2 3 3 2 2 2.4
18 1 2 1 2 1 1.4
19 3 4 4 4 4 3.8
20 4 3 3 4 4 3.6
21 3 4 4 4 3 3.6
22 2 3 3 3 3 2.8
23 3 3 3 3 3
24 3 3 3 3 3

Figure 9. Individual Student Ratings – Secondary Sources

25 1 3 3 3 3 2.6

26 4 4 4 4 3 3.8

27 3 3 3 3 4 3.2

28 4 3 3 3 3 3.2

29 4 4 4 4 4 4

30 3 3 4 3 4 3.4

31 3 4 4 4 4 3.8

32 4 4 3 3 3 3.4

33 3 3 2 3 3 2.8

34 2 3 2 2 2 2.2

35 2 3 1 2 2 2

36 3 4 3 3 4 3.4

37 4 4 4 4 4 4

38 3 3 3 3 3 3

39 3 3 2 2 1 2.2

40 4 4 4 3 4 3.8

41 3 3 3 3 3 3

42 4 3 3 3 2 3

43 3 4 4 4 4 3.8

44 3 4 4 4 4 3.8

45 4 3 3 3 3 3.2

46 4 3 3 3 4 3.4

47 3 3 3 3 3 3

48 4 4 3 3 3 3.4

Figure 10. Individual Student Ratings – Writing Ability

Coherence # t and quality of ne writing

du t
S Logic and
Grammar,
Ability to
History flow of
spelling, and
state ideas
writing writing
mechanics
and
conventions conclusions
Average

1 4 4 4 4 4 4.0
2 4 3 4 3 3 3.4
3 3 2 2 3 2 2.4
4 3 3 3 4 3 3.2
5 3 3 3 3 2 2.8
6 3 3 3 3 2 2.8
7 4 4 4 4 4 4
8 4 4 4 4 3 3.8
9 2 2 3 3 2 2.4
10 4 4 3 4 4 3.8
11 3 3 3 3 3 3
12 3 4 4 3 3 3.4
13 3 3 3 3 3 3
14 3 3 3 3 3 3
15 4 4 3 3 3 3.4
16 4 4 4 4 4 4
17 3 4 4 4 4 3.8
18 2 3 2 3 2 2.4
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20 3 3 3 2 2 2.6
21 4 3 3 3 3 3.2
22 3 4 3 4 3 3.4
23 4 3 3 3 3 3.2
24 3 3 3 3 2 2.8

25 3 3 3 3 3 3

26 4 4 4 3 3 3.6

27 3 3 3 3 3 3

28 3 4 4 4 4 3.8

29 4 3 4 4 3 3.6

30 3 3 2 2 1 2.2

31 4 3 3 4 3 3.4

32 4 4 4 4 4 4

33 4 3 3 3 3 3.8

34 2 2 3 3 3 2.6

35 3 3 3 3 3 3

36 3 3 3 3 2 2.8

37 4 4 4 3 4 3.8

38 3 3 3 3 3 3

39 3 3 3 3 4 3.2

40 4 3 3 3 3 3.2

41 3 3 3 3 2 2.8

42 3 4 4 4 4 3.8

43 4 4 3 3 3 3.4

44 4 3 3 4 3 3.4

45 3 3 2 3 3 2.8

46 3 3 3 3 3 3

47 4 3 3 3 3 3.2

48 3 4 3 3 3 3.2