

History Department Undergraduate Academic Assessment Plan

Program Goals for Majors

The department seeks to prepare majors to be future teachers in the discipline of history and, regardless of their career paths, to help them to be informed and dedicated citizens so that they may participate fully in the civic life of the communities in which they live.

Student Learning Outcomes

Graduating seniors will be able to:

1. Display knowledge of vital themes and narratives in history. This involves the ability to discuss diverse time periods, peoples, situations, and societies; to perceive past events and issues as they were experienced by people at the time; to comprehend the interplay of change and continuity; to grasp the complexity of historical causation; to appreciate the often tentative nature of judgments about the past; to understand the relationship between geography and history as a matrix of time and place, and as a context for events; and to read widely and critically in order to recognize the difference between fact and conjecture, between evidence and assertion, and thereby to frame useful questions.
2. Conduct original historical research. This involves the ability to design analytical and historiographically significant research questions; to find and analyze primary source evidence; construct an interpretation that answers the questions posed in the project; and to situate the interpretation in the historiography of the topic being analyzed.
3. Communicate historical knowledge and explanations to other people. This involves the ability to present a historical interpretation in a well-organized and logical manner; to follow proper rules of grammar and syntax; and to convey the interpretation in prose that engages the reader.

Assessment Procedure

1. Measures: Direct Assessment

In HIS 200, the required course for all history and history education majors as a prerequisite for all other 200-level and 300-level history courses, students are required to write a final research paper of no less than twelve pages, not including bibliography and footnotes, that depends on primary and secondary source research and engages secondary sources in a historiographic manner. In HIS 300, the senior capstone course, students are required to write a research paper of no less than twenty pages in length, not including bibliography and footnotes, that depends on primary and secondary source research and engages secondary sources in a historiographic manner.

Uses of the Information

The Assessment Coordinator collects a sample of HIS 200 and HIS 300 papers from all sections taught in the Department each academic year. The coordinator evaluates the papers in three categories order to measure performance in the Student Learning Outcomes listed above:

Knowledge (Outcome 1); Research and Analysis (Outcome 2);
Communication (Outcome 3)

The coordinator then reports on the results of the sample to the Chair and the DFSC. The report includes recommendations for action to improve the department's performance in achieving its desired student learning outcomes. At a faculty meeting at the start of the academic year, the faculty reviews the report, discusses the findings generated by the assessment exercise, and deliberates as to what actions to take, if any, to improve curriculum, instruction, and learning.

2. Measures: Indirect Assessment

In HIS 300, the senior capstone course, students are required to complete a 400-1000 word self-assessment of their experience in the major. They are instructed to discuss what they hoped to achieve by majoring in history at ISU; what they accomplished or failed to accomplish and why; which activities, both positive and negative, contributed most to their history education; and how well they have developed intellectually in the major (outcomes 1, 2, and 3).

Uses of the Information

The data is reviewed annually by the Assessment Coordinator and summarized in a report to the Chair and the DFSC. At a faculty meeting at the start of the academic year, the faculty reviews the report, discusses the findings generated by the assessment exercise, and deliberates as to what actions to take, if any, to improve curriculum, instruction, and learning.

Note: The Assessment Coordinator also reviews the results of the University Assessment Office's Alumni Survey, when available.

Examples of Changes Based on Assessment

1. In Spring 2007, following the creation of the Undergraduate Assessment Plan and the gathering of three years of data, the history department faculty, after considering the reports of the Assessment Coordinator, devised specific guidelines concerning the department's expectations for HIS 200 and HIS 300. These guidelines detailed the student learning outcomes desired by the department; the basic elements that should be included in each course, regardless of the section; and the requirements for the research paper in each course. The guidelines were distributed to all faculty at the beginning of Fall 2007.
2. In Fall 2007, the history department faculty agreed to revise the scoring rubric used to evaluate the sample HIS 200 and HIS 300 papers used in the Undergraduate Assessment Procedure. An additional category to measure historiographic analysis of secondary sources will henceforth be employed so as to improve the department's assessment of its performance in meeting one important aspect of student learning outcome 2.