

History Department Graduate Academic Assessment Plan

Program Goals for M.A. / M.S. History

The department seeks to prepare graduate students 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. The department also particularly seeks to familiarize graduate students with the current contours of the historiography in the various fields of history taught by the faculty and to hone their critical thinking skills.

Student Learning Outcomes

Graduating master's degree students will be able to:

1. Display knowledge of vital themes and narratives in history at an advanced level of sophistication. 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 with the potential for publication. 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 specific historical issue being analyzed.
3. Display advanced knowledge of the historiography of general topic areas, such as, for example, "late modern Europe." This skill is particularly important for two major graduate student constituencies in the department, namely students preparing to apply to doctoral programs and students who are secondary school teachers.
4. Communicate historical knowledge and explanations to other people with an advanced level of sophistication. 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 496-497, required courses for all history graduate students usually taken in their first or second semester of study, students are required to write a major paper that depends on primary and secondary source research and engages secondary sources in a historiographic manner. In history courses at the 400 level, graduate students are required to produce seminar papers that involve historiographic analysis, primary source research, or both. Finally, graduate students who opt to complete their degree with a master's thesis are required to produce a work of original scholarship of around 100 pages based on primary and secondary sources.

Uses of the Information

The Assessment Coordinator collects a sample of papers from HIS 496-497 and from students in their last semester in HIS 400-level courses, as well as the theses produced in an academic year. The coordinator evaluates the papers and the theses in four categories order to measure performance in the Student Learning Outcomes listed above:

Knowledge (Outcome 1); Research and Analysis (Outcome 2 and 3);
Communication (Outcome 4); and Historiography (Outcome 2 and 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

A. Self-Assessment

At the end of their last semester, 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 pursuing a master's degree 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, 3, and 4).

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.

B. Annual Alumni Survey

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

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.

3. Measures: Analysis of Other Graduate Programs

Every five years, the Assessment Coordinator joins the Graduate Committee in conducting a review of the graduate program. This review includes a survey of comparable and aspiration programs at other universities. Particular attention is paid to the curriculum and graduation requirements of other programs.

Uses of the Information

The Assessment Coordinator and the Graduate Committee summarize the findings of the program review for the Chair and the DFSC and make recommendations concerning how to improve the graduate program over the next five years.

Examples of Changes Based on Assessment

This assessment plan has yet to be implemented by the History Department. As part of its ongoing efforts to improve the quality of the graduate program, however, the Department directed the graduate committee to review the program last year (2007-08). This review has included an analysis of comparable and aspiration programs at other universities (measure 3 of the assessment procedure). Six other programs (Ball State, Miami University of Ohio, Bowling Green, Clemson, Colorado State, and San Francisco State) were examined with particular attention to their graduation requirements. The graduate committee is using the findings from this analysis in shaping its recommendations for significant revision of the graduate program's options for the completion of the master's degree. These recommendations will be presented to the faculty before the end of Fall 2008.