**2014-15 Annual Assessment Report, History Department**

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**Overview of Activities.**

During the reporting period, the History Department Assessment Committee examined the rubric for the forthcoming electronic assessment. We collected information, discussed items and drafted a version that should assist in scoring the collected student papers. We devoted special attention to the skills we intend students to learn during the course of their academic career – reading, researching, writing, and critical thinking.

Assessment is a regular item on the agenda of the Department meetings, and it is assisted by an Assessment Committee to discuss and plan assessment activities. With the Writing Center providing valuable data, we also regularly review necessary curriculum changes. Reading comprehension and writing ability are major issues in our field. We encourage our students to participate in the Social Science Writing Project which is offering 20 workshops to assist students in the social sciences achieve academic success.

We have generally noticed satisfactory reading and writing skills in the 497 capstone course, yet some advanced students still grapple with threshold concepts of our discipline such as critically reviewing secondary sources and staying on an analytical level. Too often, students revert back to simply describing events, which seems to be their comfort zone. In general, we experience that about a fifth of students struggle with mastering the relevant research skills, especially when writing a longer paper. In the past, intensive mandatory visits to the Writing Center have seen some inroads on this level. But we also encounter specific challenges with ESL students and foreign students in GE classes. Our tutors are limited in helping students with significant gaps in their language skills.

We are also at the crossroads regarding the utilization of shorter projects in some classes, such as the gateway 301 class. Some faculty prefer to allow students to write several shorter papers instead of the traditional 15-page final research paper. In future, we may discuss the idea of accepting electronic portfolios, via the CSUN-wide *Portfolium*.

To enhance data collection, facilitate faculty buy-in, and offer the chance at longitudinal information, we strongly support the future electronic assessment tool and envision our participation. In our Spring Meeting in April, the Committee selected the fundamental categories that we intend to use for scoring the collected papers. In general, the rubric will revolve around the ability of students to use critical thinking. The sub-categories focus on reading comprehension, evaluation of sources, independent thinking, objectivity, and the recognition of multiple narratives. We also agreed to open up room for the scoring faculty to comment on the papers they have read and improve our rubric.

**Future Activities Planned for next year.**

We look forward to engaging with the electronic assessment process, scoring the papers and gathering important information about the way our students learn. The rubric developed should assist us in this process. We hope to be able to see how this instrument can assist us and possibly adjust the rubric after our first experience with scoring the student papers. We anticipate a continuation of assessment discussions at the department meetings and during our committee sessions. We will strive to ‘close the loop’ by offering suggestions for specific classes and possible curriculum changes from the first round of electronic assessment.

During the Fall semester, we intend to select the course for electronic assessment in the Spring Semester. This will make it possible for instructors of either the 301 or the 497 sections to integrate the paper upload feature for students into their syllabus. Students will upload the paper without their names but with their student ID number. Giving instructors plenty of time should facilitate the successful data collection.