

2012-2013 Annual Program Assessment Report

Please submit report to your department chair or program coordinator, the Associate Dean of your College and the assessment office by Monday, September 30, 2013. You may submit a separate report for each program which conducted assessment activities.

College: CSBS

Department: History

Program:

Assessment liaison: Dr Dónal O'Sullivan

1. Overview of Annual Assessment Project(s). Provide a brief overview of this year's assessment plan and process.

The History Department decided to assess in 2012-13 the extent to which students in the major "learn to read and interpret historical sources critically and analytically" (SLO 3) by using direct assessment in the form of an assignment in the HIST 301 gateway class. Based on our earlier survey done previously at the same level, we attempted to identify areas of necessary improvement, especially for the large number of transfer students. Participants had to identify sources, evaluate their credibility and place them in their historical context.

2. Assessment Buy-In. Describe how your chair and faculty were involved in assessment related activities. Did department meetings include discussion of student learning assessment in a manner that included the department faculty as a whole?

Assessment is a regular item on the agenda of the Department meetings. To enhance the faculty input, the Department established an Assessment Committee to discuss and plan assessment activities. The committee members wish to ensure that program SLOs are assessed in the most effective manner and are also willing to help with data collection and analysis. The Committee analyzed recent findings from the earlier survey and the direct assessment results. The Committee members regularly teach the gateway class and are familiar with the challenges for majors to master the significant threshold concepts of history. They are among the instructors in the courses from which the data for assessment were derived and they provided the expertise and time commitment to process and analyze the results.

3. **Student Learning Outcome Assessment Project.** Answer items a-f for each SLO assessed this year. If you assessed an additional SLO, copy and paste items a-f below, BEFORE you answer them here, to provide additional reporting space.

3a. Which Student Learning Outcome was measured this year?

The Department measured aspects of SLOs 1-3. The relevant SLOS are closely related and may be assessed together by direct assessment. The data collection and evaluation for the three SLOs informed both SLOs and the assessment procedure for these SLOs are therefore described together.

- 1. To analyze and explain problems of historical interpretation;
- 2. To comprehend, articulate, and apply the various approaches to historical analysis;
- 3. To learn to read and interpret historical sources critically and analytically;

3b. Does this learning outcome align with one or more of the university's Big 5 Competencies?

Reaching these SLOs requires the student to have competencies in the following areas:

- Critical Thinking
- Written Communication
- Information Literacy

3c. Do these learning outcomes align with University's commitment to supporting diversity through the cultivation and exchange of a wide variety of ideas and points of view? In what ways did the assessed SLOs incorporate diverse perspectives related to race, ethnic/cultural identity/cultural orientations, religion, sexual orientation, gender/gender identity, disability, socio-economic status, veteran status, national origin, age, language, and employment rank?

Students in the History Major must develop proficient knowledge in a range of areas and acquire reading, writing and research skills opening them up to a diverse spectrum of ideas, opinions, experiences and viewpoints. The History Department considers its students' ability to describe diverse perspectives and reflect critically and insightfully on the correlation of these views with societal roles and status of various minorities an important part of their skill set. Several courses that are part of the undergraduate curriculum include these topics. This year's assessment of SLO1-3 addressed knowledge in the area of reading comprehension and writing ability, which are closely related to the above.

3d. What direct and/or indirect instrument(s) were used to measure these SLOs?

Data were collected through embedded assignments in HIST 301, (Historian's Craft), our gateway class for majors.

For HIST 301, a set of embedded questions targeted several crucial threshold concepts for the discipline: understanding the main features of primary source analysis, identifying the main criteria to judge the credibility of a source, and placing a source in its historical context. To demonstrate their understanding of these points, students had to correctly identify a series of sources and rank them in the order of credibility. They also had to answer whether the source addressed a given historical question or not.

In an additional embedded assignment, students wrote a short paper on a historical problem related to the course theme (Trials in history). This writing sample was then measured against a rubric developed for SLO 3 "To learn to read and interpret historical sources critically and analytically". 75% of students were able to successfully read and interpret the assigned sources, while 25% demonstrated gaps in their understanding.

Data were also collected through two staggered embedded assignments in HIST 491b, one five weeks into the course and one ten weeks into the course. Both assignments required students to write a 1,000-word paper on primary sources. The results showed marked improvement in student learning in the second assignment. In the course of the data collection, we gathered valuable information to refine and improve our rubric. Students often had difficulties identifying inherent contradictions in the sources and paying attention to language use and logic.

Finally, data were collected from repeat visitors to the History Writing Center (HWC). Analysis of a sample of 27 HWC evaluation forms shows that students who enrolled in History 370H in the Spring 2013 semester scored above the perceived average level on two questions designed to diagnose their ability to learn to read and analyze historical sources critically and analytically (SLO#3). The analysis also shows that 50% of the students who used the HWC multiple times saw a measurable improvement in their ability to use historical sources effectively.

3e. Describe the assessment design methodology: For example, was this SLO assessed longitudinally (same students at different points) or was a cross-sectional comparison used (Comparing freshmen with seniors)? If so, describe the assessment points used.

Performance was measured in the middle of the gateway (HIST 301) course, in which 25 students were enrolled. The data were intended to evaluate the extent to which students meet SLOs 1-3. They were also intended to serve as a baseline for comparison with performance in future years. The rubric included four stages of learning ability ranging from poor and satisfactory to above average, and superior.

In the 491b course, the rubric looked at 'clear awareness of the author, historical context, origin, or point-of-view of primary source', and grouped this competency in four degrees of ability.

For the HWC evaluation, Tutors working for the History Department Writing Center (HWC) use a standard rubric to assess writing competency in nine distinct categories. Tutors rank students' abilities on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being the highest).

Two of the categories on the rubric speak directly to one of the SLOs analyzed during the most recent assessment period. The SLO studied is: "To learn to read and analyze historical sources critically and analytically." The two relevant categories assessed by HWC tutors are: 1) "Evidence supports main ideas;" and 2) "Quotes are relevant."

3f. Assessment Results & Analysis of this SLO: Provide a summary of how the results were analyzed and highlight findings from the collected evidence.

For HIST 301: In general, the results of the direct assessment echoed earlier survey results about incoming majors' ability to comprehend and analyze primary sources. Especially in the gateway class, with its high number of transfer students, the learning curve is steep. By the middle of the course, when assessment occurred, the majority of the students were able to identify and understand primary source texts. A steady number of 25%, however, performed below average, demonstrated difficulties in judging the credibility of sources. They also struggled with organizing a research paper, including the formal requirements of footnotes, etc.

The lack of writing abilities and the need for special attention to transfer students from junior colleges who lack the experience of writing more substantial papers has been an ongoing concern for the Department.

Assessment results confirm the value of the History Writing Center (HWC). In its assessment results, the HWC demonstrated a significant increase in supporting students.

When applied to Professor Jeffrey Kaja's History 370H class during the Spring 2013 semester, the rubric yielded the following results.

Total Number of Student Visits: 27
 Average Score for Category 1: 2.14
 Average Score for Category 2: 1.89

The rubric identifies as average a score of 3 out of 5. Therefore, the results of this survey show that the average History 370H student who used the HWC learned how to read and analyze historical sources on a level higher than the perceived average.

Furthermore, of the 27 total visits, 9 of them were by students returning to the HWC for a second visit. Comparative analysis of the marks those students received on their first visit and their second visit shows the following:

Total Number of Second Visits: 9
 Improvement in at least one category: 5
 No Improvement in either category: 3
 Decline in at least one category: 1

These numbers show that **more than 50%** of History 370H students who used the HWC more than once improved their abilities to read and analyze historical sources.

3g. Use of Assessment Results of this SLO: Describe how assessment results were used to improve student learning. Were assessment results from previous years or from this year used to make program changes in this reporting year? (Possible changes include: changes to course content/topics covered, changes to course sequence, additions/deletions of courses in program, changes in pedagogy, changes to student advisement, changes to student support services, revisions to program SLOs, new or revised assessment instruments, other academic programmatic changes, and changes to the assessment plan.)

As stated above, the lack of writing abilities and the need for special attention to transfer students from junior colleges who lack the experience of writing more substantial papers has been an ongoing concern for the Department. We have responded by establishing

several new support resources for our majors, including the Writing Center. Graduate students are available for tutoring on a regular basis. Instructors of the gateway class have the option of giving extra credit to students who avail themselves of the tutoring sessions to nourish help-seeking behavior. Individual instructors have also eliminated multiple-choice exams in lower-division classes in favor of more essay writing assignments.

Previous assessment results have led to the establishment of the History Writing Center. We are pleased to note that students welcome the opportunity to get face-to-face help with their writing and instructors have noted significant improvements in students' writing abilities. As we continually face incoming students who need additional support, we hope to grow our mentoring and tutoring efforts in the future.

4. Assessment of Previous Changes: Present documentation that demonstrates how the previous changes in the program resulted in improved student learning.

Major changes, for example the Writing Center and increased attention on teaching writing skills throughout the program, have proven to significantly assist students and produce immediate improvements in their writing skills.

5. Changes to SLOs? Please attach an updated course alignment matrix if any changes were made. (Refer to the Curriculum Alignment Matrix Template, http://www.csun.edu/assessment/forms_guides.html.)

No changes at this time.

6. Assessment Plan: Evaluate the effectiveness of your 5 year assessment plan. How well did it inform and guide your assessment work this academic year? What process is used to develop/update the 5 year assessment plan? Please attach an updated 5 year assessment plan for 2013-2018. (Refer to Five Year Planning Template, plan B or C, http://www.csun.edu/assessment/forms_guides.html.)

The History Department hopes that the current 5-year assessment plan will provide a useful template to ensure that the department assesses essential competencies within a 5-year period. Future modifications should be expected as the faculty develops concerns or questions about strengths and weaknesses of the program offering. In our department retreat in September 2013, we discussed the impact of the gateway class and ways to strengthen student learning through changes at the content and requirements level. A large number of students struggle with the required long research paper, and we discussed the possibility of allowing students to write a series of shorter papers instead.

7. Has someone in your program completed, submitted or published a manuscript which uses or describes assessment activities in your program? Please provide citation or discuss.

No

8. Other information, assessment or reflective activities or processes not captured above.

N/A