1. What goals or learning objectives/outcomes were assessed in the AY ending June 30, 2008?

The three student learning objectives that the Assessment Committee wished to evaluate this year are (from the Department Assessment Program Goals):

1) They shall be able to write a clear expository essay in which they develop a consistent argument and marshal evidence to support an interpretation.

5) They shall develop basic critical skills in history; be able to identify and analyze fundamental problems of historical interpretation; and be familiar with at least some of the ‘schools’ of historical analysis.

6) They shall achieve a basic mastery of research techniques in history, including the use of primary historical sources both printed and electronic to compose a history research paper; they shall use citation standards acceptable in the discipline of history.

2. How did you assess these learning outcomes?

a. Describe the measures you used and the information gathered?

In the Spring semester of 2008, the History department conducted its annual assessment. This assessment is done in two parts: 1) a large sampling of graduating seniors complete an objective survey that includes questions based on the program learning objectives and 2) members of the assessment committee conduct exit interviews with graduating seniors about their experiences as History majors. The survey and exit interviews are conducted with seniors in our senior capstone courses (Hist 191/2 and Hist 197/8).

b. As a result of these assessments what did you learn about the program’s success in helping its students achieve these learning outcomes?

This year, we modified our exit interview system and thereby saw a significant increase in the number of students who participated in these interviews. The Assessment Committee interviewed 37 students who commented on a range of issues concerning the History Department program objectives.

Concerning the Objective 1 (writing), the overwhelming majority of students considered themselves capable of writing clear expository essays. Student comments on this objective included: “Higher level reading and writing than before,” “writing skills have especially improved,” and “writing has improved
dramatically, mostly because of practice.” Only three of the thirty-seven students interviewed expressed concern about their writing abilities.

Objective Five (critical skills) had equally positive responses. All thirty-seven students felt that they had improved their critical skills and had become versed in basic historiography. There were no negative comments concerning this objective. Comments ranged from “the reading really helped [me] learn about different historical arguments and compare them,” “I can critically analyze works,” and “[I can] look [at history] from different perspectives; never just one side of the story; with history always need to analyze, criticize; have to develop critical thinking skills as a history major.”

Objective Six (research) also received very encouraging responses. All of the students considered their research skills to have improved. Although the degree to which they improved was not consistent, most students felt that their research skills had significantly improved. Comments included: “I drastically improved my research skills,” “Yes, absolutely,” “Two thumbs up!,” and “Oh yeah. Coming out of high school I had no research skills – junior college a bit more – HIST 100 and on totally improved my skill in using databases, identifying sources, assessing legitimacy.” A few students, however, expressed only moderate improvement as evidenced by the following comments: “Somewhat improved” and “less sure….enjoy reading history but don’t want to do research.”

Overall, the History Department’s Annual Assessment indicates that instructors and the upper-division seminars (Hist 100, 191/2, and 197/8) are successfully fulfilling the departmental objectives listed above. The Assessment Committee recommends that history instructors continue to actively engage their students in historical inquiry, research and writing, as these activities are at the heart of the History major. There were no serious criticisms leveled against the courses or program structure that would warrant changes to the program.

c. In what areas are students doing well and achieving expectations?

Data from our survey of graduating seniors is consistent with comments collected during the exit interviews. The survey results indicate that the History major is doing a very good job of improving student writing, critical thinking and research skills; these are the principal strengths of the History major. Therefore, we have good reason to believe that the major is doing an excellent job in educating students and fulfilling its overall mission. Ninety-three percent of graduating seniors agreed that his/her studies as a History major had improved their writing skills. Graduating seniors also agreed that their critical thinking skills (93% agreed) and research skills – focused on primary sources – had improved (90% agreed).

d. What areas are seen as needing improvement within your program?
Survey data indicated that students were not as familiar with different historical schools of thought (historiographical analysis) as we would like. Although a full eighty-three percent of graduating seniors agreed that they had become more familiar with different schools of thought, only thirty-four percent strongly agreed. We would like to see more students feel confident in their understanding of historiography. However, historiography is generally introduced and emphasized only in the senior seminars, and it is more clearly in the purview of graduate studies. The survey data does suggest that we can do a better job of introducing students to historiographical analysis in the undergraduate curriculum.

Our survey covered a broad range of topics, and it also suggested that we should continue to refine our advising system. We currently require all faculty to be involved in student advising, and we understand the importance of student advising to retention in the major and university, so we will continue to examine and improve our advising program.

3. As a result of faculty reflection on these results, are there any program changes anticipated?

a. If so, what are those changes?

At our last faculty meeting of AY 2007-08, the faculty carefully considered the structure and goals of its three seminars: Hist 100 (Introduction to Historical Skills); Hist 192 (Senior Reading Seminar) and Hist 197 (Senior Research Seminar). The faculty agreed to more fully standardize these courses so that Hist 100 more fully established a firm grounding in historical research and writing for majors. We expect that by more effectively standardizing Hist 100, students will be better prepared for their upper-division course work, and particularly the senior seminars (Hist 192 and Hist 197) which are the History major capstone courses.

The department is aware that its advising system has not responded as well as it might to our majors’ needs, but we also recognize that our major has grown considerably during the last five years with about 475 majors in the Fall of 2007. During AY 2006-07, Professor Chloe Burke received an Assigned Time Faculty Senate Advising Initiate Grant in order to systemically study the department’s advising system, design advising guideline booklets for both faculty and students, recommend changes to the department’s advising system, and create new advising forms. She accomplished these tasks and presented them to the faculty at our faculty retreat prior to the beginning of the semester. We are now in the process of incorporating these recommended improvements into our advising system.

b. How will you know if these changes achieved the desired results?
Since Hist 100 is taken by second semester sophomores and first semester juniors, we expect to see improvements in student ability during AY 2008-09. The results should begin to be seen in next year’s Annual Assessment, although students already rate their overall improvement in writing and research as quite high. We seek to improve upon this response rate.

4. **Did your department engage in any other assessment activities such as the development of rubrics, course alignment?**

As a result of recommendations in our Program Review, we are currently in the process of developing assessment plans that incorporate matrixes for each of our individual programs (we administer a total of 9 undergraduate and graduate program).

5. **What assessment activities are planned for the upcoming academic year?**

Until last year, our Assessment Plan focused on our core undergraduate major, and this report likewise focuses on our undergraduate core. At our Fall 2008 faculty retreat, the faculty will consider a new Assessment Plan to be implemented in 2008-09 that will be able to assess and make appropriate recommendations for each of the programs that we administer – (three Minor degrees, two tracks in our Bachelor degree, and four graduate degree tracks or concentrations). During the summer of 2008, the Assessment Committee and Department Chair will be consulting with University Assessment Coordinator, Terry Underwood, to ensure that our new Assessment Plan meets the goals and requirements of program assessment at Sacramento State.