I. Overview

The History Department updated its assessment plan in 2008-2009 to develop a more systematic and comprehensive means of measuring the department’s new student learning objectives. During the 2009-10 academic year, the Assessment Committee used the following student learning objectives:

1) Students shall be able to write a clear expository essay in which they develop a coherent historical argument and marshal evidence to support an interpretation.
2) Students shall demonstrate adequate reading skills of primary and secondary historical sources.
3) Students shall use citation standards appropriate to the discipline of history (Chicago Manual of Style).

These new student learning objectives are a notable improvement over the previous ones, in that they are specific to the discipline of history and can be more precisely measured. They are also extremely integrated; each specific objective contributes to a cumulative learning experience. These objectives meet the demands of a rigorous education in History, as well as satisfy the university student learning objectives (see http://www.csus.edu/programassessment/University%20Learning%20Outcomes.html).

In response to the questions posed in the narrative assessment format, option one of (http://www.csus.edu/programassessment/Program%20Assessment.html), the following results were obtained. The department’s assessment committee evaluated a sample of History courses according to new student learning objectives for the 2009-10 academic year. (question #1) The committee used a total of fifty-eight (58) written assignments from the following courses for analysis: History 005 (Survey Modern Western Civilization), History 051 (Survey Modern World History), History 100 (Introduction to Historical Skills), History 197a (Senior Research Seminar, U.S.), and History 197b (Senior Research Seminar, World). These courses represent different levels of difficulty among the department’s offerings and are requirements for the major. The written samples were randomly selected to provide a broad range of responses. All faculty teaching these courses were asked to provide student papers. The committee examined papers from all the department’s senior-level seminar courses, so as to assess student achievement of the learning objectives shortly before graduation. (question #2a – part 1)

The results of the assessment shed light on areas in which the department meets the level of achievement for the learning objectives, as well as those areas that need improvement. This is the second time that the History Department has used assessment tables/quantitative
information to interpret student performance, the assessment committee continues to find them especially useful and will employ this methodology to highlight student progress from year to year. (question #4) This year, the committee developed two new student surveys to examine areas of concern and provide general insight into the effectiveness of the program. These new surveys also posed more specific questions relevant to the department’s student learning objectives. In addition, the committee formally surveyed the faculty responsible for the department’s upper division core courses to gain a more comprehensive understanding of student performance. The results of these surveys will be used on a yearly basis to help improve the course content. (question #3a) The success of this comprehensive approach will be seen in the graphs and data of student performance. (question #3b) Overall, every year’s assessment report will be used to determine areas of improvement and to help faculty in adjusting their courses to facilitate the needed improvement. (question #5)

The individual assignments from each class were:

1. History 005 – Four (4) 4-6 page essays from a section taught in fall 2009 comparing Voltaire’s Candide with Heda Kovaly’s Under a Cruel Star.
2. History 051 – Seventeen (17) one page essays from a section taught in spring 2010 analyzing primary sources related to religious fundamentalism.
3. History 100 – Twenty-five (25) written samples from three course sections taught in spring 2010. One course required a research paper, another assigned a historiographical paper, and the third a research paper prospectus.
4. History 197a – Seven (7) lengthy research papers (ranging from 17 – 25 pages) from a section taught in fall 2009 and another in spring 2010.
5. History 197b – Five (5) lengthy research papers from a course section of spring 2010. (question #2a – part 2)

Overall, the results of 2009-10 assessment show that students have attained the learning objective skills appropriate for their level of study, as established by the History Department. (question #2b) This is a remarkable achievement in light of first year students’ generally low performance in these three learning skills. As roughly half of all the students taking history courses felt they had not received the necessary skills to write a university level essay in high school, History faculty have had the added responsibility of teaching fundamental writing skills in addition to the department’s learning objectives.

Of the three learning objectives, students displayed the greatest improvement in their ability to read primary and secondary sources, as well forming arguments and the use of correct grammar. (question #2c) In contrast to 2008-2009, students who completed the upper division seminars evidenced a weakness in their citation skills. The department faculty should place greater emphasis on forming correct footnotes and bibliographies. (question #2d)
II. Assessment of individual student learning objectives:

A. Expository Essay – students must be able to produce an argument and marshal evidence to support their claims.

1. **History 005 (4 samples)**
   a. Proper argument (0), improper argument (1), lack of argument (3)
   b. Use of some (1 – 3 items) evidence (4), use of significant amount (4 or more) of evidence (0), no use of evidence (0)
   c. Correct grammar usage (1), incorrect grammar usage (3)

2. **History 051 (17 samples)**
   a. Proper argument (6), improper argument (5), lack of argument (6)
   b. Use of some (1 – 3 items) evidence (17), use of significant amount (4 or more) of evidence (0), no use of evidence (0)
   c. Correct grammar usage (5), incorrect grammar usage (12)

3. **History 100 (25 samples)**
   a. Proper argument (13), improper argument (8), lack of argument (4)
   b. Use of some (1 – 3 items) evidence (0), use of significant amount (4 or more) of evidence (25), no use of evidence (0)
   c. Correct grammar usage (19), incorrect grammar usage (6)

4. **History 197a (7 samples)**
   a. Proper argument (6), improper argument (1), lack of argument (0)
   b. Use of some (1 – 3 items) evidence (0), use of significant amount (4 or more) of evidence (7), no use of evidence (0)
   c. Correct grammar usage (4), incorrect grammar usage (3)

5. **History 197b (5 samples)**
   a. Proper argument (2), improper argument (2), lack of argument (1)
   b. Use of some (1 – 3 items) evidence (0), use of significant amount (4 or more) of evidence (5), no use of evidence (0)
   c. Correct grammar usage (3), incorrect grammar usage (2)

Section Summary:
The majority of students demonstrate significant improvement in forming arguments, using evidence to support their arguments, and writing in grammatically correct English. Less than half of the lower division students could form an argument; many displayed a poor grasp of English grammar. However, upper division students demonstrated a greater understanding of what constitutes an argument and could properly explain their points using both primary and secondary sources. The biggest improvement for this learning objective is in the use of sources. All students in the upper division seminar courses used four or more sources for their
papers. The ability to comprehend a wide variety of sources and marshal them for supporting an argument is a positive outcome for this specific student learning outcome.

B. Reading Skills – students must be able to comprehend both primary and secondary historical sources.

1. History 005 (4 samples)
   a. **primary sources** –
      - use of primary sources (0),
      - lack of use of primary sources (4),
      - demonstrates comprehension of primary source (0),
      - lack of comprehension of primary sources (4)
   b. **secondary** –
      - use of secondary sources (4),
      - lack of use of secondary sources (0),
      - demonstrates comprehension of secondary source (4),
      - lack of comprehension of secondary sources (0)

2. History 051 (17 samples)
   a. **primary sources** –
      - use of primary sources (13),
      - lack of use of primary sources (4),
      - demonstrates comprehension of primary source (10),
      - lack of comprehension of primary sources (7)
   b. **secondary** –
      - use of secondary sources (10),
      - lack of use of secondary sources (7),
      - demonstrates comprehension of secondary source (5),
      - lack of comprehension of secondary sources (12)

3. History 100 (25 samples)
   a. **primary sources** –
      - use of primary sources (16),
      - lack of use of primary sources (9),
      - demonstrates comprehension of primary source (15),
      - lack of comprehension of primary sources (10)
   b. **secondary** –
      - use of secondary sources (25),
      - lack of use of secondary sources (0),
      - demonstrates comprehension of secondary source (25),
      - lack of comprehension of secondary sources (0)

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1 Two of the papers came from a section that required an historiographical paper as the cumulative assignment. Students had written essays analyzing primary sources earlier in the semester.
4. History 197a (7 samples)
   a. primary sources –
      use of primary sources (7),
      lack of use of primary sources (0),
      demonstrates comprehension of primary source (7),
      lack of comprehension of primary sources (0)
   b. secondary –
      use of secondary sources (7),
      lack of use of secondary sources (0),
      demonstrates comprehension of secondary source (7),
      lack of comprehension of secondary sources (0)

5. History 197b (5 samples)
   a. primary sources –
      use of primary sources (5),
      lack of use of primary sources (0),
      demonstrates comprehension of primary source (5),
      lack of comprehension of primary sources (0)
   b. secondary –
      use of secondary sources (5),
      lack of use of secondary sources (0),
      demonstrates comprehension of secondary source (5),
      lack of comprehension of secondary sources (0)

Section Summary: The majority of students comprehend secondary sources properly in all levels of coursework. For the lower division courses (005, 051), students analyzed one to three primary and/or secondary sources. Although students in History 051 had the most difficulty analyzing and comparing short primary sources, this problem was less prevalent among History 100 students. Nonetheless, a significant minority of History 100 students continued to struggle with the appropriate use of primary sources. All students had overcome this difficulty by the completion of the History 197 writing seminar.

C. Citation Standards – both footnotes and quotations are to follow the Chicago Manual of Style.

1. History 005 (4 samples):
   a. footnotes – no footnotes (4), improper footnote citation (0), proper footnote citation (0)

   b. quotations –
      block quote improperly formatted (0),
      block quote properly formatted (0)
      no block quotation (4)
improper quotation format (3),
proper quotation format (1)
improper citation of text (2),
proper citation of text (2),
no quotation of text in essay (0),

c. bibliography – no bibliography (4), improper bibliography (0), proper bibliography (0)

2. History 051 (17 samples):
   a. footnotes – no footnotes (17), improper footnote citation (0), proper footnote citation (0)

   b. quotations –
      block quote improperly formatted (2),
      block quote properly formatted (0)
      no block quotation (15)
      improper quotation format (10),
      proper quotation format (5)
      improper citation of text (16),
      proper citation of text (1),
      no quotation of text in essay (2),

   c. bibliography – no bibliography (17), improper bibliography (0), proper bibliography (0)

3. History 100 (25 samples):
   a. footnotes – no footnotes (1)², improper footnote citation (16), proper footnote citation (8)

   b. quotations –
      block quote improperly formatted (3),
      block quote properly formatted (9),
      no block quotation (12)
      improper quotation format (5),
      proper quotation format (19),
      improper citation of text (7),
      proper citation of text (18)
      no quotation of text in essay (1),

   c. bibliography – no bibliography (1), improper bibliography (12), proper bibliography (10)

4. History 197a (7 samples):
   a. footnotes – no footnotes (0), improper footnote citation (4), proper footnote citation (3)

   b. quotations –
      block quote improperly formatted (4),

² This paper was an annotated bibliography which did not require footnotes.
5. History 197b (5 samples):
   a. footnotes – no footnotes (0), improper footnote citation (3), proper footnote citation (2)
   
   b. quotations –
      block quote improperly formatted (1),
      block quote properly formatted (1),
      no block quotation (3)
      improper quotation format (0),
      proper quotation format (5),
      improper citation of text (1),
      proper citation of text (4),
      no quotation of text in essay (0)

   c. bibliography – no bibliography (0), improper bibliography (3), proper bibliography (2)

Section Summary: With only one exception, students demonstrated a dramatic improvement in their citation skills between the lower division courses (005/51) and the upper division courses (100/197a,b). While students in History 100 still had difficulty with properly footnoting their sources, overall, they evidenced greater competency in their ability to quote passages and texts properly. Of the twelve student samples from History 197a and b, eight students (67%) quoted passages and texts correctly. Formatting block quotes also seems to challenge students, and more intensive instruction on this specific issue along with footnotes should be encouraged. In addition, students continued to have difficulty in forming correct footnotes and bibliographies. Only seven of the students (58%) in the History 197 seminars produced properly formatted bibliographies, and only five of the students (42%) could footnote their sources correctly. Overall, students who complete the History 197 seminar reflect a reasonable competency in their citation skills.

III. Assessment of Faculty and Student Surveys

During the 2009-2010 academic year, the committee conducted two assessment surveys: one for the faculty and one for the students. The committee rewrote the pre-existing student survey to gain more specific information regarding the three student learning objectives and the general experience and preparation of the students in the classes. The revisions proved useful and further minor modifications will be made to the survey in the 2010-2011 academic year.
The faculty survey is a new addition to the assessment program. While students are often surveyed for their input on learning objectives and/or classes, the Assessment Committee viewed that a faculty survey would provide additional insight into the classroom experience. With this in mind, a faculty survey was administered to instructors teaching History 100, 192, and 197. Together, these two surveys provide a comprehensive picture of the student learning experience and progress towards the student learning objectives in these core courses.

A. Student Surveys:

I. The following questions were posed to the students in History 100:

1. In what way did the furlough situation impact your education?
2. What courses (either currently in the catalog or not) would you like to have taken that have not been offered by the History Department?
3. How well did your high school education prepare you for college-level writing?
4. Which, if any, of your lower-division courses, offered either in History or another discipline, had writing assignments?
5. Which lower-division course, offered either in History or another discipline, helped to develop your writing the most?
6. Did History 100 teach you the difference between primary and secondary sources?
7. Did History 100 teach you how to analyze both kinds of sources?
8. Did History 100 teach you how to structure a research paper?
9. Did History 100 teach you the Chicago citation style?
10. How well did History 100 prepare you for upper-division writing assignments? What was the most useful aspect of the course?
11. Was History 100 an effective course for developing your research and writing skills? How could the department improve this course?

Section Summary: Overall, students felt that the furloughs had a large impact on their classes, but that their instructors had nonetheless done an excellent job of conveying reading and writing skills. Fifty-four (54) students – 61% – felt that furloughs had reduced the quality of instruction. Students commonly complained that their fees were increased by 30% while the quality of their education decreased. All respondents felt pressured to learn material in a shorter amount of time.

Despite the negative impact of the furloughs, the students responded positively to the range of courses offered. However, the majority of students requested more ‘thematic’ courses (e.g. ‘Jack the Ripper,’ ‘History of Espionage,’ ‘History of War,’ ‘History of Sports,’ and ‘The 1960s’). While students were generally happy with the U.S. course offerings, they requested more contemporary courses, with special interest in the 1960s and Vietnam.

The most candid responses came in response to the question on their writing skills. Thirty-six (36) of the students – 41% – noted that their high schools did an inadequate job preparing them for college-level writing. For those students who considered themselves well prepared, a good portion of them had attended private schools or completed A.P. English courses.

In comparison to other departments at Sac State, courses in the History Department require more writing assignments than most others (80% of students stated that they had more
writing assignments in their history courses). Over one-third (33%) of the students surveyed considered that their history courses, rather than their English courses, developed their writing skills. Only three percent (3%) considered English courses to be doing a better job of developing writing skills.

For the final set of questions, numbers 7 – 11, students overwhelmingly confirmed that their instructors were successful in teaching them the skills necessary to write a research paper. Ninety-one percent (91%) of all students were pleased with their instruction in analyzing both primary and secondary sources. Eighty-five percent (85%) of all students overwhelmingly confirmed that their instructors taught them how to structure a research paper. Seventy-six percent (76%) of all students were pleased with their instruction in the Chicago citation style. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of all students were pleased with their preparation for upper division writing. Finally, seventy-five percent (75%) of all students confirmed that their instructors developed their research and writing skills.

II. The following questions were posed to the students in History 192/197:

1. In what way did the furlough situation impact your education?
2. What courses (either currently in the catalog or not) would you like to have taken that have not been offered by the History Department?
3. Did History 192 help your critical analysis skills?
4. Did History 197 help improve your research and writing skills?
5. How did History 197 build on what you learned in History 100?
6. How can the History Department improve its 100 and 197 courses?
7. Which upper-division course, offered either in History or another discipline, helped to develop your critical analysis skills the most?
8. Which upper-division course, offered either in History or another discipline, helped to develop your research skills the most?
9. Which upper-division course, offered either in History or another discipline, helped to develop your writing skills the most?
10. Do you think that being a history major has improved your research and writing skills?
11. Do you feel the critical analysis, research, and writing skills you learned as a history major will be helpful in your future career?

Section Summary: The students enrolled in History 192 and 197 were candid in their responses regarding the general status of the university, the curriculum of the History Department, and the skills acquired in the program. The current furlough situation on campus has been enormously detrimental to the quality of instruction the students receive. The haphazard manner in faculty were required to take furloughs (days deducted from individual courses in a piecemeal fashion, rather than across-the-board campus closures) frustrated students; they complained about the lack of access to faculty and the inopportune times administrative offices were closed. Grievances highlighted the budgetary difficulties of this campus, particularly the reduced number of courses and the noticeable gaps in the types of classes offered.

In regard to the History Department’s student learning objectives, students affirm that they are acquiring the three major skills: critical analysis, research and writing, and
Chicago citations. Ninety percent (90%) of the students think that they have learned critical analysis, while eighty-seven percent (87%) affirm that they have learned how to conduct research and write essays of various forms. While there was no question specifically regarding citation skills, students frequently mentioned how they had mastered the Chicago style of citation.

The most positive responses came to the curriculum questions. The overwhelming majority of students surveyed found the History Department to excel in teaching critical analysis, and research and writing. When asked if courses in other departments met or surpassed the courses offered in the History Department in the teaching of these skills, students mentioned only three departments: English, Government, and Humanities and Religious Studies. None of these departments received more than 6% of the student votes. Of the History courses that the students felt were most decisive to learning the three aforementioned skills, History 100, 192, and 197 received the most votes. In short, these critical courses in the History Program have been effective in achieving the department’s student learning objectives.

While Students offered minor recommendations to improve these three core courses, no student indicated the classes needed significant alterations. The recommendations for improvement ranged from greater standardization of the requirements in History 100 to maintaining small class sizes (ca. 20 students) for the senior seminars (192/7). History faculty were lauded for their abilities and students mentioned specific faculty by name for their excellence in the classroom.

Finally, students completing the History Program considered the skills they learned in the classroom to be useful for their future careers. Students commented that these skills ‘will be useful even in everyday life. Just finding credible information is very helpful’.

B. Faculty Survey:
The following questions were posed to the faculty teaching History 100/192/197:
1. Which of the following classes have you taught: 100, 192, 197?
2. How long have you been teaching this/these course(s)?
3. What books do you feel are the most important for your course(s)?
4. Which of the books you assign for the course(s) you wish you could change and why?
5. By the end of the semester, what skills do most of your History 100 students master?
6. By the end of the semester, with what skills do most of your History 100 students still struggle?
7. By the end of the semester, what skills do most of your History 192 students master?
8. By the end of the semester, with what skills do most of your History 192 students still struggle?
9. By the end of the semester, what skills do most of your History 197 students master?
10. By the end of the semester, with what skills do most of your History 197 students still struggle?
11. What changes would you make in History 100 – structure, goals, assignments?
12. What changes would you make in History 192 – structure, goals, assignments?
13. What changes would you make in History 197 – structure, goals, assignments?
14. Any other comments – criticisms – recommendations?

Section Summary: Over half of the faculty who teach the three courses responded to the survey. Most of the faculty were pleased with their methodological approach for History 100 (75%). Half of the faculty (50%) did consider changing some or all of the materials assigned for History 100. There was no consensus regarding the skills acquired in History 100, but one-fourth (25%) of faculty did concur that their students had mastered the ability to locate and obtain both primary and secondary source material in the Library. In addition, half of the faculty responses consider that students had significant difficulty with citation. This observation is echoed in the data analysis, Section II no 3 (page 6), where sixty-four percent (64%) of students in all three courses were able to footnote a source properly and roughly half (52%) could form a bibliography correctly.

Faculty are generally satisfied with the structure of the History 197 courses; in both, the methodology and materials have proven successful. The faculty are unanimous in stressing that students still have difficulties with their writing. Some students need to improve the clarity of their writing while others cannot form original arguments based on archival sources. Faculty teaching these two capstone courses emphasize that students who did not master the writing skills taught in History 100 have significant difficulties in their work for History 197.

IV. Table of Performance

These tables of performance illustrate the degree to which students showed improvement in regards to the department’s student learning objectives.

I. Student Learning Objective (A) – Expository Essay

Evidence:

![Graph showing Significant Amount of Evidence Used in Essay](image-url)
II. Student Learning Objective (B) – Reading Skills

Use of Sources Assigned for Reading:
Comprehension of Sources Assigned for Reading:

![Comprehension of Sources Assigned for Reading graph]

III. Student Learning Objective (C) – Citation Standards

Footnote and Citation Format:

![Proper Format of Footnotes and Citations graph]
Section Summary: The graphs are especially reflective of the strengths and weaknesses of student writing. Students demonstrate remarkable improvement in their use and comprehension of sources. They also show significant improvement in their writing skills by the time they complete History 100. In terms of citations, students need additional guidance in
formatting footnotes and block quotes. Overall, students clearly improve their writing and comprehension skills over the course of their undergraduate studies.

IV. Conclusion of Assessment

The History Department’s revised student learning objectives have been more effective in gauging student progress. For the academic year 2009-10, history majors showed a marked progress towards achieving these objectives. Furthermore, the survey results highlighted the virtues of the faculty and the major; the overwhelming majority of students surveyed found the History Department to excel in teaching critical analysis, research and writing. Of all History courses, students surveyed felt History 100, 192, and 197 were most critical for learning these skills. In short, these core courses in the History Program have succeeded in helping most students achieve the department’s goals for their development.

On the basis of this assessment, the committee recommends instructors of History 100 place greater emphasis on the following core skills: forming arguments, using correct English grammar, as well as appropriately formatting block quotes, citations, and bibliographies. Ultimately, the committee feels History 100 is the most important course in the major for developing research and writing skills, and therefore the committee suggests the department consider the standardization of History 100 as well as the limitation of class size to address these issues more effectively.

The assessment committee examined a large pool of papers during the 2009-10 academic year, and conducted both student and faculty surveys, allowing for a relatively comprehensive overview of core courses within the major. This investigation has demonstrated that students are making progress towards the student learning objectives, but also indicated some areas for improvement. This comprehensive survey approach will continue to be used in the 2010-11 assessment report.