

HISTORY DEPARTMENT ASSESSMENT 2012-13

Option 1: Narrative Submission

I. Overview

The History Department used its updated assessment plan, developed in 2008-2009, to measure the department's student learning objectives in a more systematic and comprehensive means. During the 2012-13 academic year, the Assessment Committee assessed student learning objective number three (3):

- 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 student learning objectives are specific to the discipline of history and can be 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 sixty-eight (68) written assignments from the following courses for analysis: History 5 (Survey Modern Western Civilization), History 100 (Introduction to Historical Skills), and History 197A/B (Senior Research Seminar, U.S./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 fourth 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 conducted an informal survey of the faculty responsible

for the department's upper division core courses to gain a more comprehensive understanding of faculty concerns as well student performance regarding each course. The results of this survey will be disseminated to the History faculty to discuss means of improving 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 – Twenty-nine (29) written samples from two course sections taught in spring 2013. One course required a 3- page essays asking students to respond to a set of primary sources and the second course required a 3 – 5 page response essay from a required monograph.

2. History 100 – Twenty-seven (27) written samples from seven course sections taught in the fall 2012 and spring 2013. Six courses required a research prospectus and the remaining course required an 8 – 10 page research paper.

3. History 197 – Twelve (12) lengthy research papers (ranging from 17 – 25 pages) from two sections taught in fall 2012 and spring 2013. (Question #2a – part 2)

Overall, the results of 2012-13 assessment show that students have satisfactorily attained the learning objective skills of student learning objective number three (3), appropriate for their level of study, as established by the History Department. (Question #2b) While there is area for improvement in this learning objective, it must be emphasized that the first year students performed very poorly on this highly technical learning skill. In addition, roughly half of all the students taking history courses expressed in previous student surveys that they had not received the necessary skills to write a university level essay in high school. As a result, History faculty have the added responsibility of teaching fundamental writing skills in addition to the department's learning objectives.

II. Assessment of individual student learning objectives:

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

1. History 005 (29 samples):

A. footnotes – no footnotes (29), improper footnote citation (0), proper footnote citation (0)

B. quotations –

block quote improperly formatted (1),

block quote properly formatted (0)

no block quotation (28)

improper quotation format (18),

proper quotation format (10)

improper citation of text (13),
 proper citation of text (16),
 no quotation of text in essay (1),

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

2. History 100 (27 samples):

a. footnotes – no footnotes (1)¹, improper footnote citation (14), proper footnote citation (12)

b. quotations –

block quote improperly formatted (5),
 block quote properly formatted (1),
 no block quotation (21)
 improper quotation format (12),
 proper quotation format (12),
 improper citation of text (8),
 proper citation of text (19)
 no quotation of text in essay (3),

c. bibliography – no bibliography (2), improper bibliography (12), proper bibliography (13)

3. History 197a/b (12 samples):

a. footnotes – no footnotes (0), improper footnote citation (6), proper footnote citation (6)

b. quotations –

block quote improperly formatted (3),
 block quote properly formatted (6),
 no block quotation (3)
 improper quotation format (1),
 proper quotation format (11),
 improper citation of text (3),
 proper citation of text (9),
 no quotation of text in essay (0)

c. bibliography – no bibliography (0), improper bibliography (7), proper bibliography (5)

Section Summary: With only one exception, students demonstrated a significant improvement in their citation skills between the lower division course (5) 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 than those students in History 5. Of the twelve student samples from History 197A and B, eleven students (92%) quoted passages and texts correctly. Formatting block quotes and a

¹ One paper had neither endnotes nor footnotes.

bibliography also seem to challenge students, and more intensive instruction on these specific issues along should be encouraged. Overall, students who complete the History 197 seminar reflect a solid competency in their citation skills.

III. Assessment of Faculty Survey

During the 2012-2013 academic year, the committee conducted an informal assessment survey for the faculty teaching the writing courses critical to the history major: History 100, 192, and 197. This survey sheds light, from a faculty perspective, of the student learning experience. The comments from the six faculty members highlight student progress towards the student learning objectives in these core courses. The committee revised the previous faculty survey to allow the faculty to comment on issues they felt were important to convey to the committee. This revision proved useful and the committee will continue to modify the questionnaire, as conditions merit.

Faculty Informal Survey:

The following questions were posed to the faculty teaching History 100/192/197:

1. Are you pleased with the current course structure of History 100/192/197? If not, what changes would you recommend? Yes: 6 No: 0
2. Are you pleased with the current course content of History 100/192/197? If not, what changes would you recommend? Yes: 5 No: 1 The single negative answer was based on the opinion that Kate Turabian's book *A Manual for Writers* is too difficult for the History 100 students. Another faculty recommended that Robert Perrin's *Pocket Guide to the Chicago Manual of Style* be substituted for *A Manual for Writers*.
3. Are there any general problems in History 100/192/197 you can identify? If so, can you explain them? Students procrastinate and/or do not complete assignments for History 100, students are generally not prepared for writing assignments in either History 100 or 197 due to poor writing ability and/or grammar skills from either high school or junior college, students in History 100 have little knowledge of how to properly research and write a paper, student readiness overall for the course objectives in History 100 is a major problem, students in History 100 do not think that they need to attend every class session or consider attending class secondary to their work schedules, and students are often not as motivated as would be necessary for this course.
4. What are the main areas for improvement in History 100/192/197? For History 100, there should be more discussion on what a historiographical essay entails, for History 197, a seminar session with the archivists in SCUA should be scheduled to understand how to locate and use archives, and two sessions with Ben Amata

- (historical librarian) on research skills for library materials (books, articles, interlibrary loan, etc.), do not use Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers* for History 100, as many students find it too complex, History 100, 192, and 197 instructors should discuss ways to improve History 100 with the aim of better preparing students for the senior seminars.
5. Any other comments – criticisms – recommendations? For History 197, when giving students freedom to choose an essay topic, they tend to struggle or even fail, for History 197, one faculty recommends learning basic research skills by using university archives on campus, for History 197, one faculty stresses that the students should receive a list of viable research topics, based on the existing local university archives/materials, three faculty recommended that they keep the current structure of the classes (History 100/192/197) as they are currently formulated, one faculty member suggested the department consider ways of encouraging history majors to exercise their citation skills outside of the three seminars.

Section Summary: Over half of the faculty (60%) who teach the three courses responded to the survey. Most of the faculty who participated in the survey had taught the courses numerous times. Over half of the faculty (60%) had taught all three classes for six years or more. This survey sample was especially useful as these individuals were in a strong position to discuss the courses' strengths and weaknesses. The majority of the faculty were pleased with their methodological approach for all three courses (80%). Only one faculty considered making changes to any of the courses; this change was not in the structure or content of the course, but rather the selection process for the paper topics.

Most of the faculty (80%) were satisfied with the course materials assigned for History 100. The only change recommended was that Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers* is not an ideal choice for History 100. However, the majority of faculty (80%) for History 100 were concerned that students were not as motivated in History 100 which led to incomplete assignments or poor quality assignments. In addition, nearly half of the faculty (40%) expressed concern regarding the preparedness of the students in their writing abilities. One faculty emphasized that History 100 students have great difficulty understanding the difference between arguments and facts.

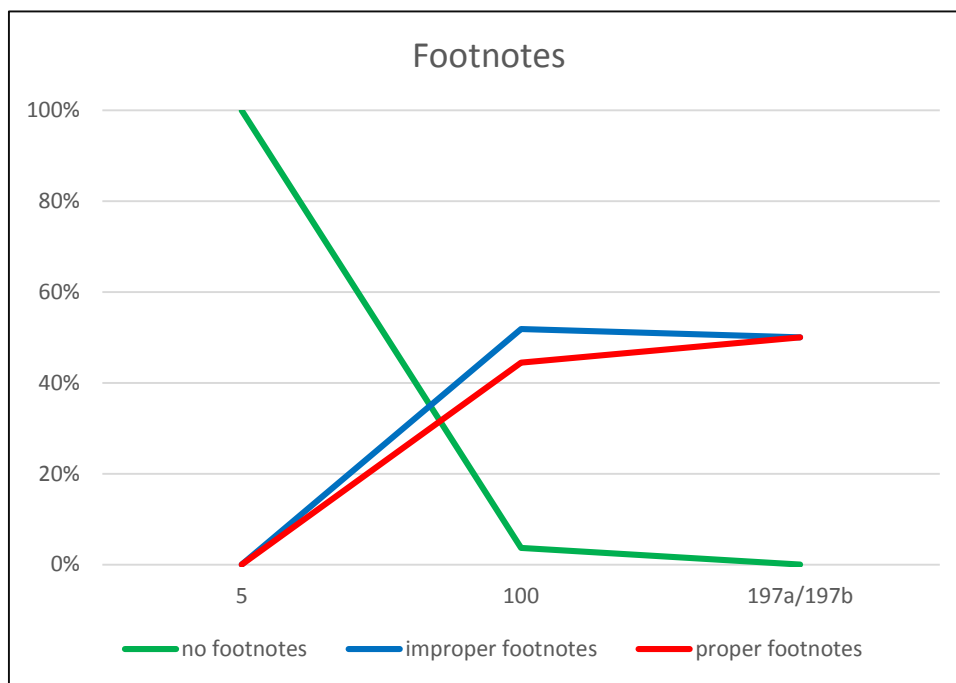
Faculty are generally satisfied with the structure of the History 192/7 courses; in both, the methodology and materials have proven successful. The faculty are unanimous in stressing that students still have difficulties with their writing.

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.

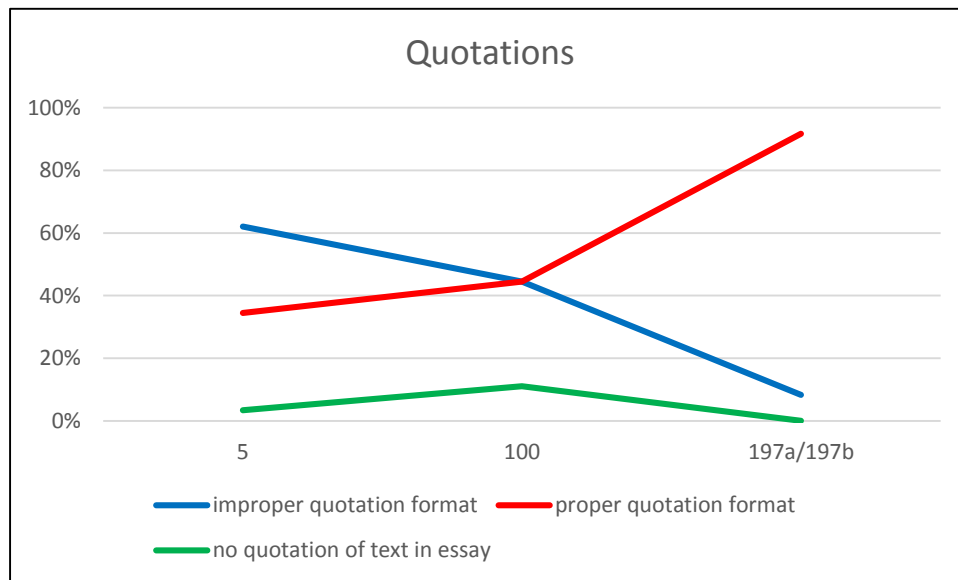
Student Learning Objective (3) – Citation Standards

A. Use of Footnotes for Writing Assignment²:

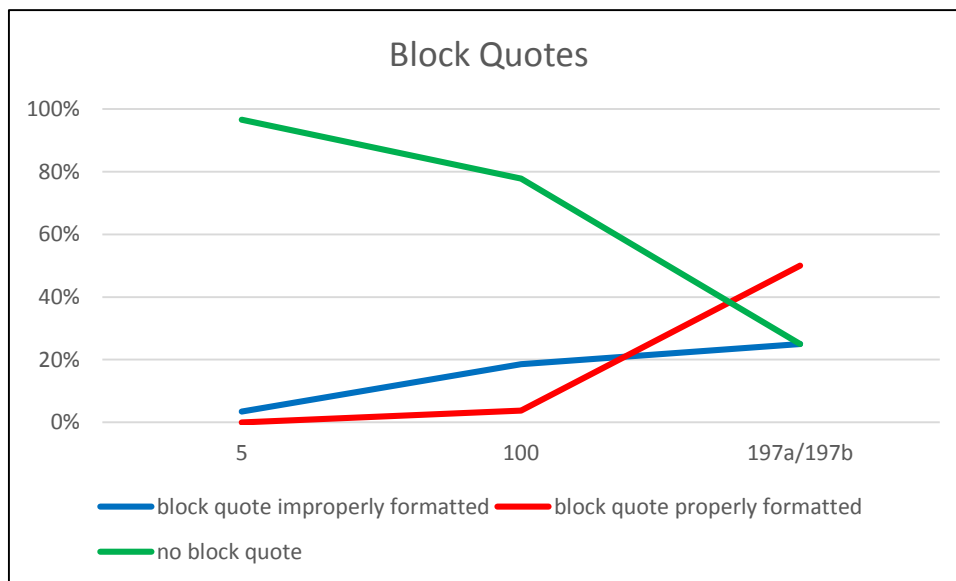


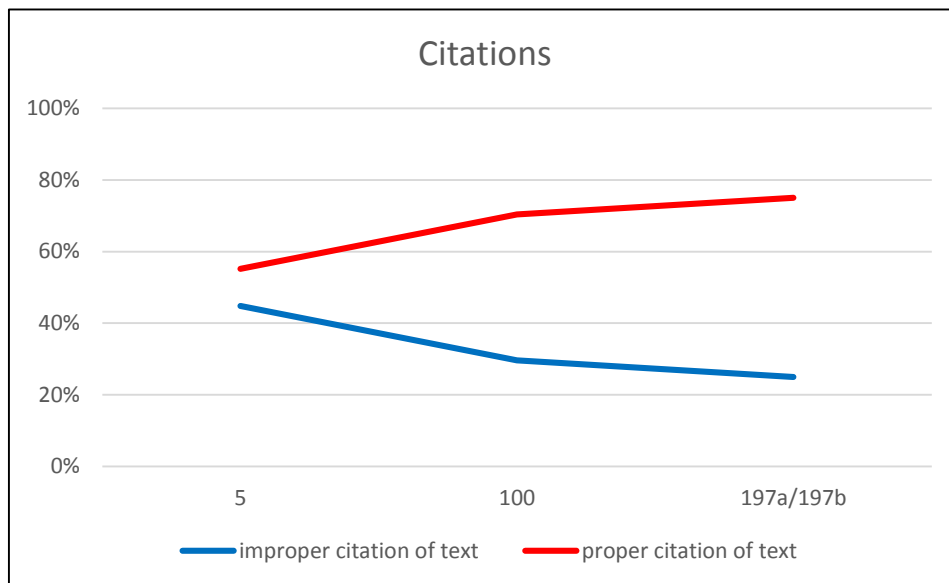
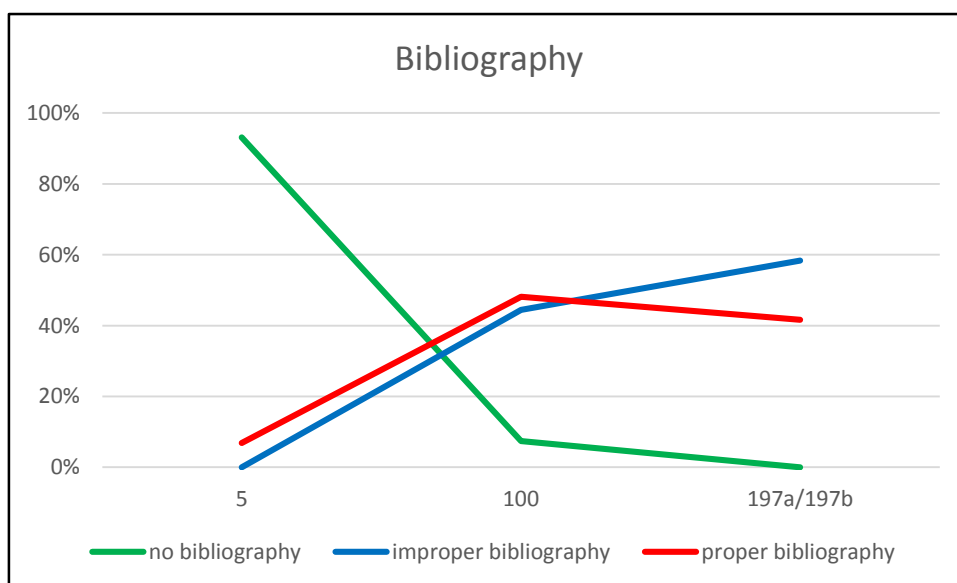
² One paper had neither endnotes nor footnotes.

B. Use of Quotations for Writing Assignment:



C. Use of Block Quotes for Writing Assignment:



D. Use of Citations for Writing Assignment:**E. Use of Bibliography for Writing Assignment:**

Section Summary: The graphs are especially reflective of the strengths and weaknesses of student writing. Students demonstrate an improvement in their use and ability to format quotations (both in block form or in-text) and citation of sources. However, students showed difficulty in formatting footnotes and bibliographies correctly. The committee recommends that faculty in History 100 spend additional time in teaching these two items so that students will evidence a stronger mastery by the end of History 197. Overall, students showed clear improvement in their knowledge of appropriate citation standards over the course of their undergraduate studies.

IV. Conclusion of Assessment

The History Department's revised the student learning objectives have been extremely effective in gauging student progress. For the academic year 2012-13, history majors showed a marked progress towards achieving the skills in student learning objective number three (3). Furthermore, the faculty survey results highlighted both the strengths and the weaknesses of the writing courses in the major: the courses themselves were properly organized and, upon completion of the three courses, the overwhelming majority of students showed mastery of the skills taught. Faculty stressed that the students' weakness in their writing abilities added an extra component to their teaching objectives for the courses, which resulted in less time to focus on understanding and using primary and secondary sources. Despite this challenge to the faculty, 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 proper formatting so that the following core skills can be acquired: identifying arguments in scholarly works, developing arguments in essays, and using both primary and secondary sources in their final assignments. 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 establishing clearer course goals and assignments.

In addition, last year the committee recommended that the department select one faculty member to teach both the 192 and 197 as a sequence. Dr. Mitch Numark volunteered for this 'pilot program' and commented that students benefitted from taking these courses sequentially with him as opposed to different instructors. Numark opined that the pilot program was beneficial for students, but emphasized that 'the performance of a given student really depended on 'the particular abilities of the student... [and his or her] dedication to actually do what is assigned.' The committee recommends that this pilot program be repeated again next year with another faculty member to see if this pattern of success continues.

The assessment committee examined a random sample of papers during the 2012-13 academic year, and conducted 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 second student learning objective, but also indicated some areas for improvement. This comprehensive survey approach will continue to be used in the 2013-14 assessment report.