

HISTORY DEPARTMENT ASSESSMENT REPORT **2013 – 2014**

I. Overview

The History Department updated its assessment plan in 2008-9 to develop a more systematic and comprehensive means of measuring the department's new student learn objectives. These Student Learning Objectives (hereafter SLO) are:

- 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*).**

A total of 86 written assignments from the following courses were used for analysis: History 005 (Survey Modern Western Civilization), 51 (World Civilization, 1600 to present), 100 (Introduction to Historical Skills), 197a (Senior Research Seminar, U.S.), 197b (Senior Research Seminar, World). These courses incorporate all levels of difficulty in the major and are requirements for the completion of the major. The written samples were randomly selected to give a range of responses.

The individual assignments from each class were:

- 1. History 005** – Twenty (20) written samples were selected from the assignment focusing on a book essay. All students were to write a 3-4 page essay on Heda Kovaly's *Under a Cruel Star*.
- 2. History 51** – Eighteen (18) written samples were selected from the assignment focusing on imperialism using class lecture and reading materials.
- 3. History 100** – Twenty-nine (29) written samples from three course sections were selected. Two of the courses assigned a research paper, while one course assigned a research paper prospectus.
- 4. History 197** – Nineteen (19) papers were selected from three courses sections. All courses assigned a lengthy research paper (ranging from 17 – 25 pages).

Section Summary:

Students who complete a History Major will be able to acquire the skills of SLO #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." The three Program Learning Objectives (hereafter PLO) required for SLO #1 are: PLO 1.1) formulating an argument, PLO 1.2) using evidence to support an argument, and PLO 1.3) writing in a grammatically correct manner. There was great improvement shown in each of the tasks associated with PLO #1. Nearly one hundred percent of all students in every course level used an appropriate amount of evidence in their written assignments. In regards to argument and grammar usage, students showed a consistent degree of improvement. Nearly seventy percent (70%) of all students in

History 197 were able to do so successfully. While there is still room for improvement, this might be challenging for grammar usage. Students consistently struggle with their writing and this is underscored by the comments in the History 100 surveys. With the exception of students in the A. P. program or private schools, all others did not feel that they received adequate instruction in English composition.

II. Summary of Results and Methodology

Expository Essay – students must be able to write a clear expository essay in which they develop a coherent historical argument and marshal evidence to support an interpretation.

History 005

1. Argument: proper (3); improper (9), lack of argument (8) 15%, 45%, 40%
2. Use of Evidence: use of some (1 – 3) evidence (19), use of significant amount (4 or more) of evidence (); no use of evidence (1) 100%
3. Grammar: correct grammar usage (10); incorrect grammar usage (10) 50%, 50%

History 51

1. Argument: proper (6); improper (9), lack of argument (3) 33%, 50%, 17%
2. Use of Evidence: use of some (1 – 3) evidence (18), use of significant amount (4 or more) of evidence (); no use of evidence () 100%
3. Grammar: correct grammar usage (6); incorrect grammar usage (12) 33%, 67%

History 100 (29 samples)

1. Argument: proper (14); improper (11), lack of argument (4) 48%, 40%, 14%
2. Use of Evidence: use of some (1 – 3) evidence (2), use of significant amount (4 or more) of evidence (27); no use of evidence () 7%, 93%
3. Grammar: correct grammar usage (17); incorrect grammar usage (12) 59%, 41%

History 197 (19 samples)

1. Argument: proper (13); improper (5), lack of argument (1) 68%, 27%, 5%
2. Use of Evidence: use of some (1 – 3) evidence (), use of significant amount (4 or more) of evidence (19); no use of evidence () 100%
3. Grammar: correct grammar usage (13); incorrect grammar usage (6) 68%, 32%

Summary of Data:

Students who have completed the History Major will have the ability to formulate an argument, use evidence to support an argument, and also use correct grammar usage. For formulating an argument, only twenty-two percent (22%) of the students in History 005 and 51 could do so properly. By the end of the program, the majority of the students could formulate an argument properly. Similarly, students showed a significant amount of improvement in their writing skills. While only forty-one percent (41%) of the students in 005/51 could write grammatically correct sentences, nearly seventy percent (70%) of the students in History 197 could do so. This data is corroborated by the surveys given to students in 197 where ninety-four percent (94%) of the students considered that their research and writing skills had improved. Students showed

the greatest skill in using evidence to support an argument; over ninety-eight percent (98%) of all students successfully marshalled evidence in their written essays. Overall, the Assessment Committee is satisfied with these results, but will recommend means to improve students' ability to formulate an argument and use grammatically correct English in their writing.

Methodology – For the 2013-14 Assessment Report, the Committee established the criteria for sample selection and for assessment methodology. For the sample selection, a total of 86 written assignments from the following courses were used for analysis: History 005 (Survey Modern Western Civilization), 51 (World Civilization, 1600 to present), 100 (Introduction to Historical Skills), 197a (Senior Research Seminar, U.S.), 197b (Senior Research Seminar, World). Each sample was comprised of at least 18 papers which gave the Committee a satisfactory sample size in order to conduct assessment and to consider the samples appropriate representations of student abilities. The specific courses were selected because: 1) they are part of the requirements for the History Major, 2) they incorporate benchmark, milestone, and capstone courses, and 3) they incorporate all levels of difficulty in the major and are requirements for the completion of the major. The written samples were randomly selected to give a range of responses and to avoid any 'skewing' of assessment results.

For the methodology employed to assess each PLO, various criteria were developed to review each written sample. Only one faculty member reviewed the essays to guarantee consistency in the review process. The specific criteria for each PLO are:

For PLO 1.1, students are tasked with formulating an argument. There were three identifiable types of argument usage: 1) no argument, 2) improperly formulated argument, and 3) correctly formulated argument. The argument would have to be located in the introductory section of an essay and must be specific enough for the reader to understand the specific arguments/approach that would be undertaken throughout the body of the paper.

For PLO 1.2, students are tasked with using evidence to support an argument. There were three identifiable types of evidence usage: 1) 1-3 pieces of evidence, 2) 4 or more pieces of evidence, and 3) no evidence. Not only must a piece of evidence be cited/attributed in the essay, but an explanation of the content of the evidence was required.

For PLO 1.3, students are tasked with demonstrating correct grammar in writing. there were two identifiable types of grammatical usage: 1) proper usage, and 2) improper usage. Grammatical 'proper usage' was determined as such: 1) for benchmark courses, History 005/51, if four or more grammatical errors were found in three successive paragraphs, then the paper was considered to make 'improper usage of grammar,' 2) for milestone courses, History 100, if three or more grammatical errors were found in three successive paragraphs, then the paper was considered to make 'improper usage of grammar,' 3) for capstone courses, History 197, if two or more grammatical errors were found in three successive paragraphs, then the paper was considered to make 'improper usage of grammar.' This rubric, along with the rubrics for PLO 1.1 and 1.2, was deliberately selected for its comprehensive approach and corresponds to the VALUE rubric for student progress and ability for the undergraduate degree. These carefully constructed rubrics will complement the rubrics currently being designed for the History Graduate Programs in Standard History and Public History.

III. Student Surveys

During the 2013-14 academic year, the Assessment Committee conducted an assessment survey of History 100 and 197 students. The Committee refined the previous survey in order to gather more specific information regarding the three student learning objectives, the general experience and preparation of the students in the classes, as well as the improvements made to the program as a result of previous assessment recommendations.

The Committee received responses from both sections of History 197 and from three of the five sections of History 100. Nearly twenty students from each section surveyed responded to the survey, and the Committee considers this number to surpass the threshold for a 'reasonable sample size.' Every faculty approached to distribute the survey was cooperative and ensured a maximum student response. Approximately ninety-six (96) students responded to the survey given at the end of Spring 2014. The survey supplements the information gathered from the paper analysis and also provides important feedback to the department for improving the program and facilitating the students' efforts to acquire all three learning objectives successfully.

History 100 Assessment Questions:

1. How would you rate the general quality of your history instructors? Please explain.
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? Please explain.
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? Explain.
7. Did History 100 teach you how to analyze both kinds of sources? Explain.
8. Did History 100 teach you how to structure a research paper? Explain.
9. Did History 100 teach you the Chicago citation style? Explain.
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? Explain.

History 100 Survey Section Summary:

Forty-two (42) students responded to this survey. Students overall considered their education in the History Department to be excellent. When asked about the quality of their instructors and classes, the overwhelming majority responded favorably. Eighty-five percent (85%) of the students considered their instructors to be either excellent or very good. In regards to the History 100 course itself, ninety-eight percent (98%) of the students thought that it was an effective course for developing one's research and writing skills. Of all the other departments on campus, only English was considered to rival History in terms of writing assignments and

developing one's writing. As seen in previous years, students continue to regard their high school preparation to be inadequate for college level writing. Exactly half of all the students thought their writing preparation to be either 'not very good' or 'poor.' Only ten percent (10%) of the students thought that they had excellent preparation for college writing. Every student who responded positively attributed their preparation to coming either from a private school or having taken advanced preparation courses in public school.

History 197 Assessment Questions:

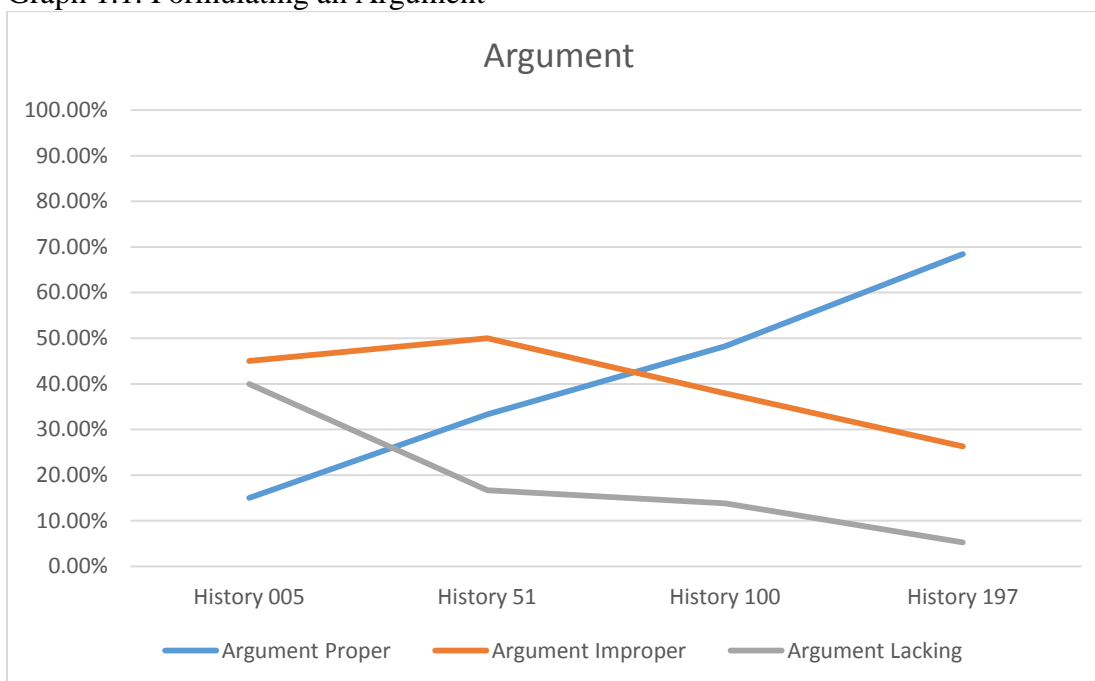
1. How would you rate the general quality of your history instructors? Please explain.
2. What courses (either currently in the catalog or not) would you like to have taken that have not been offered by the History Department?
3. Did History 192 help your critical analysis skills?
4. Did History 197 help improve your research and writing skills?
5. Did History 197 build on what you learned in History 100? Explain.
6. How can the History Department improve its 100 and 197 courses?
7. Which upper-division course, offered either in History or another discipline, offered either 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? Explain.
11. Do you feel the critical analysis, research, and writing skills you learned as a history major will be helpful in your future career?

History 192/197 Survey Section Summary:

Fifty-four (54) students responded to this survey. As seen in the History 100 survey, History 192/7 students consider their education in the History Department to be excellent. When asked about their instructors and classes, they, too, responded favorably. Ninety-four percent (94%) of the students responded with either 'very good' or 'excellent.' The remaining three students responded with 'good.' In regards to the History 197 course, ninety-four percent (94%) thought that the course helped improve their research and writing skills. Eighty-three percent (83%) of the students also thought that their History 192 course improved their critical analysis skills. This reinforces the results of the analysis conducted on the papers for this course. Students overwhelmingly perceived History 197 as a culminating experience in the program; eighty-five percent (85%) of the students agreed that the course successfully built on the student learning goals of History 100. In retrospect, one hundred percent (100%) of the students considered that majoring in History improved their research and writing skills. Ninety-one percent (94%) of the students consider that their critical analysis, research, and writing skills would be helpful in their future careers. Several students found that having a B.A. in History has helped them find a job. A common perspective by those in the workforce is exemplified in the following comment: "I currently work in a management position and already see an advantage over others with less developed skills. The ability to think critically about problems and issues in order to develop creative and effective solutions is a definite advantage. The ability to write professionally and communicate effectively also provides opportunities that would otherwise be nonexistent."

IV. Graphs

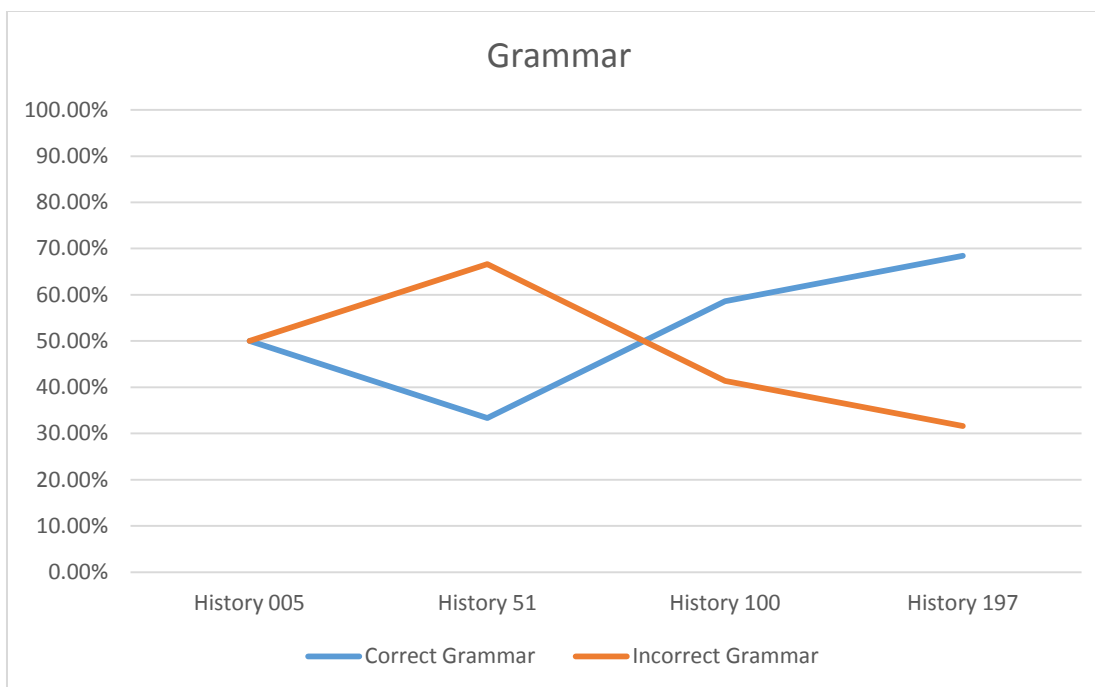
Graph 1.1. Formulating an Argument



Graph 1.2. Use of Evidence



Graph 1.3. Grammar Usage



V. Conclusion and Committee Recommendations

The Assessment Committee is satisfied with the results of the 2013-14 History Department Assessment of Student Learning Objective #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.” Of the three specific PLO’s that were examined, History Department majors excel at using evidence to support their arguments in a written essay. Students nearly meet the target for formulating an argument and using correct grammar. The Committee would like to commend the Department for adopting a recommendation made in 2011-12 for having a single faculty member teaching both History 192 and 197 in succession. Students have commented favorably regarding this scheduling issue and the Committee recommends that this become a common feature of the senior capstone seminars. The Committee would also like to recommend two changes for the coming academic years: 1) a ‘writing lab’ be added to the History 100 to assist students in their grammar skills, and 2) faculty members teaching History 197 should be encouraged to allocate additional time for, and place special emphasis on, helping students develop properly formulated arguments. The Committee agrees that the History Department is fulfilling its mission for the Student Learning Objectives and should be commended.