

## PART II. ASSESSMENT

### A. Introduction

The History Department is committed to assessing student learning as a vital part of its expressed mission “to teach students about the past and about the discipline of history as an integral part of a complete liberal arts education.” The Department has described what it wants students to learn in the following

Learning Outcomes for our undergraduate students:

Students who earn the B.A. in history will be able:

- to demonstrate general knowledge of U.S. and world history and in-depth knowledge of a particular historical question;
- to recognize and to pose significant historical questions;
- to find useful primary and secondary sources;
- to analyze sources critically;
- to cite sources properly;
- to write and to speak clearly;
- to construct a persuasive historical argument based on evidence; and
- to think historically.

The Department’s assessment activities reflect its members’ conviction that teaching and learning, like any human activity, can be understood through sustained, rigorous reflection and interpretation of relevant evidence. In order to carry out its teaching mission as effectively as it can, the Department therefore seeks to measure student learning through the activities described below.

### B. Assessing Student Learning in the Methodology Course

At the beginning of each semester students in HIST 2302 The Historian’s Craft: Methodology take an ungraded assessment examination to help the History Department determine how successfully the survey courses, and some upper-level courses, have prepared students for the upper-level courses in the major. The examination asks

the students to: (1) describe their history coursework to date; (2) describe what they have learned about the nature of historical inquiry; (3) define plagiarism, bias, and historiography; and (4) pose and answer a historical question.

One of the assignments in the Methodology course requires students to use a primary source or sources to understand the historical past. That student writing is assessed to gauge students' ability to: (1) assert a thesis making a historical claim worth arguing about; (2) cite sources correctly; (3) sustain the thesis with evidence from the source; (4) write clearly and persuasively; and (5) think historically.

C. Assessing Student Learning in the Senior Seminar Course      Students in the outcomes. In addition, the instructor and another faculty member assess a sample of about ten senior seminar papers each year to gauge how well students are meeting the Department's stated learning outcomes. The instructor of the Senior Seminar course will select the sample to reflect accurately the range of quality of papers written in the course.

Students also are required to write a reflective essay describing what they have learned in their undergraduate education and evaluating what they perceive to be the strengths and weaknesses of the program.

#### D. Assessing Student Learning through the GACE Examination

Students pursuing certification to teach in the secondary schools are required to take the Georgia Assessments for the Certification of Educators (GACE) examination in History. That test, a standardized multiple-choice examination that covers factual material related to U.S. and world history, is not administered by the Department. The Department will track the scores of students on the examination as a

means of gauging student learning.

E. Analyzing Assessment Data

Each year the Undergraduate Education Coordinator, in consultation with the instructors of the Methodology and Senior Seminar courses, will prepare an assessment report to the Department that considers student learning as measured through each of the instruments described here. The report will consider how well students are meeting the desired learning outcomes. Where the evidence suggests improvements could be made, the report will make recommendations to improve student learning.

Adopted 4/30/09

HISTORY DEPARTMENT: ASSESSMENT EXAMINATION

*General Instructions:*

Please provide essay answers to all four of the questions below. The purpose of this examination is to assist the department to improve its program. It is part of a spectrum of activities designed to provide the department with an improved understanding of its students and their needs.

Performance on this examination is in no way related to your grade in History 2302:

Methodology. However, you will not receive a grade in this class until you hand in the exam.

1. Describe in a paragraph essay what work you have had to date in the field of history (give specific courses), and why you decided to major in history.
2. Looking back at your history course work to date, what have you learned about the nature of historical study? What themes or topics have been of most interest to you, and why? Try to support your general observations with specific illustrations drawn from specific courses.
3. Each of the following is a term that history students should know. Define each of them as specifically as possible.  
historiography  
plagiarism  
bias
4. Write a brief essay on a historical question of your choosing. Some examples of historical questions are: Why were the American colonists successful in their war of independence from Great Britain? How did the Qing conquest of 1644 change Chinese administration? What was the greatest contribution to Arabic culture made by Mohammed? Do **not** write on one of those questions; come up with one of your own and answer it. Once again, try to be as specific as possible in your essay.

Rubric for Senior Seminar Papers

1. **Academic Honesty**
  - A. Does the paper adhere to the fundamental requirement of academic honesty? Pass/Fail
  
2. **Analysis**
  - A. Does the paper pose a significant historical question?
  - B. Does the paper offer a clear, persuasive thesis making a claim worth arguing about?
  - C. Does the paper position its thesis within the context of the existing historiography?
  - D. Does the paper effectively use evidence in support of its argument?
  - E. Does the paper demonstrate critical analysis of sources?
  - F. Is the paper free from any failure to document sources, including omissions that appear inadvertent or otherwise not egregious?
  - G. Does the paper demonstrate an ability to think historically?
  - H. Is the analysis marked by particular originality or insight?
  
3. **Research**
  - A. Does the paper reflect a substantial amount of research?
  - B. Has the paper found and engaged with the most important primary and secondary sources?
  - C. Does the paper reflect in-depth knowledge of the subject?
  
4. **Organization**
  - A. Is there a logical organization to the paper?
  - B. Are paragraphs within the paper logically organized?
  - C. Does the paper flow smoothly?
  
5. **Writing**
  - A. Is the writing clear and precise?
  - B. Is the writing persuasive?
  - C. Is the writing free from grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, spelling, citation format, or other errors?
  
6. **Other**
  - A. Does the paper reflect that its author considered comments offered previously by the instructor?
  - B. Does the paper indicate that a good deal of effort went into it?
  - C. Does the paper give an overall impression of high quality?

Adopted 4/30/09

## PART II. ASSESSMENT

### C. Assessment Plan for Master of Arts in History

#### LEARNING OUTCOMES SOUGHT

The M.A. in History at West Georgia has for its primary purpose the development of a more sophisticated understanding of the discipline of history for the post-baccalaureate student accepted into our master's program.

#### **Graduate Program: Master's Degree:**

Students completing the Master of Arts Degree in History, through the completion of the thesis or non-thesis program will:

- a. demonstrate the ability to undertake advanced historical research;
- b. show basic familiarity with historical literature in major and minor fields of study;
- c. demonstrate an understanding of historiography and its permutations over time;
- d. be able to identify and describe career options in the field of history;
- e. demonstrate a knowledge of the theory and ethics of public history [for Public History concentration];
- f. demonstrate knowledge of the standards and practices for at least two fields in public history [for Public History concentration];
- g. apply practical skills in at least two fields of public history [for Public History concentration].

[Revised 2/02]

#### METHODS OF ASSESSING STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT

1. To assess research and writing skills, a paper is required in the historiography seminar (the one course required of all history M.A. students). (Learning outcomes a,b,c)
2. Also in the historiography class each student must present one or more oral reports based on his or her reading and research. (Learning outcomes a,b,c)

3. All members of the Department have been periodically invited to participate in the Historiography Seminar. (Learning outcome d)

4. To obtain an overall assessment of the entire M.A. program in history, each student completing an M.A. has taken a written and/or oral examination, given by three professors.

5. For those electing to write a Master's Thesis, the thesis also has been a major instrument of evaluation. Three professors have engaged in this evaluation as well.

#### HOW ASSESSMENT HAS BEEN USED TO IMPROVE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE M.A. PROGRAM IN HISTORY

Members of the History Graduate Studies Committee have participated in the ongoing evaluations of the program, along with the Department Chair, and have:

1. expanded participation of Department members in the Historiography Seminar.
2. increased the number of 6000-level offerings in History to at least one per semester (with the exception of summer semester) and have offered them at night at the request of students.
3. emphasized the research and writing component of the M.A. program in history, to encourage more students to write the thesis (especially if later desiring to enter a Ph.D.program)
4. instituted an effective and popular Public History program (1997) and Museum Studies Certificate program.

October, 1995 [rev. 2/02]

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Department members are encouraged to use assessment results in revising teaching methods and course materials.