

## **Assessment Report for History Department, Spring, Summer, and Fall Semesters of 2010**

The following assessment report is divided into three sections. The first section consists of Assessment reports filed by the individual instructors of History 2302, The Historians' Craft: Methodology. The second section consists of commentary by the instructor of the department's first offering of a special seminar with a focus on historiography, designed to help improve our student's ability to understand the importance of historiography and to incorporate it into their research papers and other written work on history. The third section consists of assessment reports on the work of students taking the departmental capstone course, the Senior Seminar, History 4486.

### **SECTION I: Methodology Assessment Report**

#### **A. Summer 2010 by Dr. Hebert**

During Session II of the Summer Semester of 2010, I taught HIST 2302: The Historian's Craft: Methodology. This was the first time that I taught this course. The class met twice weekly for 2.5 hours per meeting for eight weeks. Initially, I thought that offering the course during the condensed summer session would be problematic. The students, however, appeared to benefit from the condensed schedule. With only 16 class sessions, students had assignments due every meeting. The assigned reading load for each period was equivalent to what they would have read over the course of a week during a regular semester. For some, this condensed schedule allowed them to focus more attention upon the subject matter. Unfortunately, many students enroll in too many courses during Session II. Some of the students in the course were taking 15 hours and simply could not keep up with the workload. In the future, advisors might want to dissuade students from taking more than 9 hours of credits during Session II. Of the 19 students who completed the course, 18 were history majors. A political science major enrolled in the course and performed well throughout the semester and offered some interesting insights into how our two disciplines contrast.

I administered the assessment exam during the second class meeting. The attitude that student's expressed going into the exam was mixed. Some students took the exam quite seriously and viewed it as a reflection upon their general intelligence and future success in the course. Others hurried through the exam and exerted little thought or effort to the assignment. Consequently, some students, who I know understood many of the issues assessed in the exam, did poorly on the assessment because they failed to take it seriously. When asked to describe their prior history coursework, most student responses exhibited a general understanding of the interdisciplinary nature of our field. Many reported that in addition to completing the four required history survey courses, they had completed courses in art history, music appreciation, sociology, and anthropology that had helped prepare them to advance into their major.

When asked what they had learned about the nature of historical study from their prior coursework, many students responded by answering a different question: why are you interested in history? Most students stated that they have decided to study history because they want to become a high school teacher. One or two even expressed some resentment that they have to major in history as part of their education certification. Some students responded that they had learned that doing history required more than just the memorization of facts. Some commented that history is like a science—a field of inquiry that possesses a method for documenting its results. One student commented that the process of acquiring historical knowledge is unending. Overall, students seemed to grasp that historians conduct research that documents humans in the past.

When asked what themes or topics in history interest them, a majority of students expressed an interest in learning about the world outside of their immediate surroundings. Many students declared an interest in ancient Greek and Roman history, Latin American history, and other world fields of inquiry. Many of these same students were later disappointed to learn that historians need to know a foreign language to read primary sources in those fields.

When asked to define historiography, students responded with a variety of understandings. One student commented that historiography “is the term used when categorizing history.” Another wrote that historiography “focuses on the minutest point much like biology. . . . [it] studies history at a small place.” The course devoted an entire week to the subject of historiography. I found that that students struggle to understand how contemporary historians build their work upon what has come before them. They struggle to identify contrasting points of view among two opposing points of views. They struggle to understand how the selection of evidence and the period in which the history was written can affect the end result. Overall, I think historiography is one of the weakest areas of understanding for methods students.

When asked to define plagiarism, most replied “plagiarism is copying another’s work and is highly frowned upon.” Students grasped that plagiarism is equivalent to academic fraud and/or theft. They struggled, however, to understand what acts are considered plagiarism. Students struggled throughout the semester to understand why it is so critical that historians properly cite their sources. Most considered citations to be a punishment inflicted upon them by professors who only want them to do more work. Students failed to understand that without proper citations, they were all guilty of committing acts of plagiarism.

When asked to define bias, student universally associated bias with issues related to racism and sexism. I think there is a strong connection between a student’s misunderstanding of historiography and their inability to understand the potential biases that exist with a work of history. Too many students view history as stories of events frozen in time that are simply retold by new historians every generation. They completely miss the role that interpretation and the human experience play in how historians interpret the past. This is another major weakness.

When asked to write a brief essay on a historical question of their choosing, most students selected topics that interested them and ones that they later chose for their semester research papers. Examples of historical questions that students selected were: “Where did Romans obtain their religious views from?”; “What affects [sic] did the formation of NATO have on Latin American prosperity from natural resources?”; “Why were so many allied lives lost in the D-Day invasion?”; “Why did some colonists feel the need to abolish slavery?” Some of their questions expressed an interest in connecting the past with the present. For example, one student asked why does the United States consider Fidel Castro to be a threat? Most of these essays were extremely broad. They asked questions that would require a library’s worth of space to answer. This is a problem that I confronted as the students developed their research paper topics.

## **B. Spring 2010 by Dr.. Vasconcellos**

In the Spring 2010 semester, I expanded the enrollment of my previous Methodology class from 20 to 35 students. At the start of the semester, as I did with the previous class, I gave them an assessment exam of 8 questions, and I asked them to give a short bio of themselves, why they are interested in history, and why they became a history major. I also asked them how they would use their BA in history: graduate school or teaching.

Most students wanted to teach, largely at the secondary level, while a few did want to go on to grad school. A handful of my students are not history majors, and will go on to work in the fields of business and law. Every student had a clear understanding of the field of history, mostly stating that it was a study of the past, while a few went on to state that historians help give an understanding of cause and effect so that one can prepare for the future. In other words, we must learn from history or be doomed to repeat it. Only a few students could give a clear definition of revisionist history, and even fewer understood the field of Public History (something that Dr. Ann McCleary cleared up for them during her guest lecture in March). Revisionist history was noted as being altered history, a different opinion or reinterpretation of past events, a history that was made false, or simply "revised." Only two students mentioned presenting an unbiased opinion of a controversial subject and/or using previously undiscovered sources to shed insight on a past event. A few students left the question blank when asked, meaning that they had no clue. We had mixed reviews on the nature of primary and secondary sources. . .while most understood what these sources were, only a few gave the required number of examples when asked (5 for primary and 3 for secondary). Students were also asked if a secondary source could be used as a primary source, and most felt that the answer was no, although a few students did argue that yes, it could be used if one used a novel as a primary source by examining what the novel revealed about the period in which it was written. A few students had no idea what these sources were, and two got them mixed up. While most students could define plagiarism, most did not agree that paraphrasing was plagiarism. Lastly, a few students did understand what was required of a good book review, although most simply stated that a book review should discuss the scope of the book. Only a few students argued that argument and evidence should be discussed, and even fewer noted that the book should be placed within the present historiography.

My overall feeling about this class is that we have a lot of work to do, but there are some students who have a solid foundation already. In other words: a mixed group of kids, who are likely taking this class at very different places within their major.

### Document Summary Papers

At the start of the semester, as I did with the previous class, I gave them an assignment asking them to choose a primary source document from one of the UWG online library databases, summarize said document, and include in their summary a direct quote, a paraphrased citation, and a blocked quote of no more than 10 lines.

The results of this assignment were quite favorable. All students but two produced a summary of a primary source document, meaning two were still unclear on exactly what a primary source was despite a lengthy discussion on primary sources and their usefulness. Each student, but one, produced a detailed summary of their selected source with the required number and type of quotes. Yet, one student did not include a paraphrased citation, or at least they forgot to cite it. A few students went beyond the required summary to actually analyze the documents that they chose, and that was a welcomed change from the dry narratives that I mostly read. When asked why they decided to analyze rather than simply summarize, they all replied "that's not what historians do" in one way or another. A couple students were unclear as to where they should look for the documents, despite a detailed tutorial on what our library has with me using the online databases as a guide in class. A few others were unsure exactly what type of document to choose, and we met individually to discuss their interests and how they might benefit by using these documents in other papers they were writing for their other classes. I should note that I stressed to my students that they should choose something that they could use in another paper, so as to get a jump on their research. I don't know how many students actually took that advice, but I do know

from class conversation that many students in the class are taking that approach with their book reviews as well (i.e. reading something that they would use as a secondary sources for another research paper so as to kill two birds with one stone).

My overall assessment of this assignment: students enjoyed the assignment, and benefitted from the task of using three different types of citations. Students also understood how to summarize a document in two pages or less, with some seeing a summary as unchallenging and boring and opting for a more analysis heavy approach. Pretty pleased with this batch of papers, and I think the rest of the papers that I ask them to write will be as favorable. I hope.

### **C. Fall 2010 and Spring 2011 by Dr. Pacholl**

#### Introduction

The following assessment report is based on three sections of Methodology taught over the 2010-11 school year: 12:30-1:45pm T/Th (Fall 2010), 5:30-8:00pm T (Fall 2010), and 5:30-8:00pm T (Spring 2011). A total of 45 students completed the three sections (17, 13, and 15 students respectively).

#### Assessment Exam

I administered the mandatory assessment exam for Methodology during the first week of each semester. Student responses to each question are analyzed below.

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.*

Here is the breakdown of student experience in history prior to taking Methodology:

- 25 had taken only survey courses (56%)
- 8 had taken one upper-division course (18%)
- 6 had taken 2-3 upper-division courses (13%)
- 6 had taken 4 or more upper-division courses (13%)

For half the class, Methodology came at the appropriate time when they could learn about the skills of history before launching into upper-division courses. Unfortunately, 26% of the class had already taken at least two upper-division courses before taking Methodology. This is problematic because they are taking history courses with little preparation in historical methodology which could limit their effectiveness in upper-division courses.

There are diverse reasons why students decided to major in history. Three main influences discerned in student responses were:

#### **a) Family history and interest**

Family background and experiences directed a number of students into the field of history. Some indicated that conversations with parents and grandparents influenced their passion for history. One student declared that "I decided to major in history because my father is a history buff and we would always watch the History Channel and we love to learn about things from the past." Another stated that "From when I was a young child, I have heard stories from my grandfather who was in WWII and my father who was in the Vietnam War. From their stories, I have learned so much from those eras."

## **b) Intrinsic passion and enjoyment of history**

Some students expressed a passion for history that was fostered by learning about new things or inspired by a teacher. According to one student, "I love learning about different ways of life and other cultures." Another credited Dr. Charles Lipp with inspiring his passion for history: "My favorite class has been World history with Dr. Lipp. His class was very engaging and I really fell in love with history from other cultures." Others believed that history was necessary to understand today's world. Per one student, "If we do not know where we came from how can we know where we are heading?"

## **c) Employment / teaching**

While family and passion motivated a number of students, a majority indicated a desire to teach as the main reason for becoming a history major. Some expressed a pragmatic view that history is an integral part of any curriculum, so becoming a history major would help land them a job. According to one student, "History has always been one of the 5 or 6 subjects taught throughout the entire education system." Others viewed teaching as a way to influence students of tomorrow. Per one student, "I want to be able to affects students and give them the same passion for history that my A.P. United States history teacher did." Another respondent wanted to "help connect my students to past events and people and make history not just facts on a page."

*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 most interest to you, and why? Try and support your general observations with specific illustrations drawn from specific courses.*

Students again offered various perspectives about the nature of historical study. Four general themes emerged from student responses:

### **a) Uniqueness of history**

Students recognized that history offers a unique methodological approach, particularly when compared to other disciplines. This includes an emphasis on reading and writing. According to one student, "I have learned that it takes time, a lot of research, and patience to find what you are looking for. It also takes a lot of reading and writing." Another student declared that "Historical study is very analytical and requires a lot of reading and research." Most students understood that history involves an extensive amount reading and writing.

### **b) Primary v. secondary sources**

A few students emphasized the importance of sources in their understanding of historical study. This group recognized that different types of sources are necessary to engage in historical scholarship. One respondent declared: "In all my history classes one primary thing I have noticed is that historians use primary documents, paintings, firsthand accounts etc. to draw an opinion on what life may have been like in the time period." This also included gauging the effectiveness of particular sources and biases they might include: "I have learned that you really have to be careful what and who you study because not all sources are credible." Finally, a couple of students commented on the use of internet sources when conducting online research: "all sources must be checked for their trustworthiness, especially internet sources . . . many internet sites untrue after talking with Dr. de Nie."

### **c) Historical perspective**

A number of students commented about the unique perspective that history offers. I was impressed by several answers that focused on the broader implications of historical study. One student astutely observed that “I have learned that looking back at the history of this nation gives one a better understanding of current cultural trends and problems that still exist in our society.” Another believed that historical knowledge contributed to a more tolerant approach to the world: “educating yourself can eliminate a whole lot of ignorance, prejudice, and hate in the world.”

**d) Fact v. Interpretation**

I found that 20% of the students addressed the difference between fact and interpretation when engaging in historical study. These students recognized that history is more than just a study of fact, and how interpretation is crucial when it comes to historical scholarship. A few comments from students will illustrate this point:

- “I realize that history is never black and white. Sure, there are correct answers such as dates, people, and places, but they can be seen in very different ways depending on how a person looks at the subject.”
- “History is subjective to who is reading it or researching a particular subject. A citizen in Canada will view American history differently than an American citizen.”
- “Historical study to me is an individual’s interpretation of something in the past. History will change because the people studying it will change.”
- “I have learned that the nature of historical study can be subjective. . . . historians are continuously changing how these events can be viewed by offering different perspectives.”

My favorite response is the following:

- “I have learned a great deal about the inherently subjective nature of historical study. The discipline seems to be built upon the exegesis of primary documents and artifacts which necessarily lend themselves to myriad interpretations. To draw a particularly interesting example from U.S. History (HIST 2112), the period of Reconstruction as documented in post-bellum South bears little resemblance to the later ‘reconstruction’ of Reconstruction by Northern historians during the civil rights era of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”

Overall, I am impressed by the range of answers given by students about the nature of historical study. While this may not always translate into A grades for students, the above comments indicate that a majority of our students come into the program with a basic awareness of key components relating to historical research. I think it also speaks highly of our approach in upper-division courses (recognizing that a 44% of our students came into Methodology haven taken at least one upper-division course); but even more, I think it attests to the effectiveness of communicating the basics of historical study at the survey level – a majority of our students (56%) only had classes at the survey level.

Regarding themes and topics in history, the response was overwhelmingly diverse. Although a majority emphasized an interest in U.S. history, a number of students indicated an interest in non-American areas including Europe, Asia, and antiquity. They also expressed interest in an array of

themes that included women's history, religion, military history, politics, biography, and local history.

3. *Each of the following is a term that history students should know. Define each of them as specifically as possible.*

**historiography**

Most students indicated that historiography means "the study of history." Few of them, however, expanded on exactly what this meant. I find the following answer more indicative (and truthful) of how most students probably feel about the term historiography when beginning Methodology: "I really don't know what the exact definition of historiography is. I would imagine that it is simply the study of history." Several confessed to having no idea what the term meant.

**plagiarism**

Most students successfully defined plagiarism on a basic level. One student defined plagiarism as "The taking of another person's words or ideas without their consent and using them as if they were your words and original ideas." Most of the answers reflected this understanding. However, I do think we need to continually reinforce the department's understanding of plagiarism from the survey level through upper-division courses.

**bias**

Bias proved a bit more difficult for students to define. Most understood that it means being subjective, but to what extent this means, and how it impacts historical study, there was little explanation. The answers by several students seem to suggest that they believe history teaches about ultimate truth, and somehow bias obstructs our understanding of this truth. According to one student, bias is "having preconceived beliefs that interfere with the learning and teaching of events and their causes that have been proven truthful." Another echoed similar sentiments: "letting your own beliefs color your work or perception of events instead of letting the facts be known, whether you agree with them or not." Their answers reflect a need to make sure the issue of bias is covered in some depth in Methodology.

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 on your own and answer it. Once again, try and be as specific as possible in your essay.*

Students generally did well in posing a historical question. The majority posed effective questions that were articulated in specific questions. One student asked "What spawned European exploration of the New World?" The answer emphasized issues of religion, science, and population as the primary motivating forces behind exploration. Another student queried, "What caused Cherokee Removal?" The answer included a discussion of federal/state issues, sovereignty of Native Americans, and attempts at "civilization."

Several students posed ineffective questions that were more speculative in nature and thus beyond the purview of history. One student asked "What would have happened had Harry Truman

not dismissed Douglas MacArthur from his duties during the Korean War?" Another posed "How do you think WWII would have ended if Hitler had chosen not to kill himself?" A third asked "Is the use of Peyote in Native American Religion legal or illegal?" I used these examples during a class discussion where we talked about the types of questions we can effectively answer in history. Students quickly realized why these types of questions are ineffective.

### Paper Assignments

Students submitted several papers for each semester. The first is the mandated primary source document evaluation. This included a three-page analysis of a primary document that I assigned. Students generally struggled with the assignment for a couple of reasons. First, it is their first paper assignment for the class, and many haven't had experience working with primary sources. Second, their writing needs significant improvement. While a few students turned in excellent papers, most struggled to articulate their thoughts effectively. Many failed to adequately address the main thesis/arguments of the source, often focusing on only one or two arguments made by the authors.

Students also completed a research paper on a subject of their choice. The paper is eight pages in length and should be based on the use of primary sources. I think it is important to give them a larger research project in order to show how the process of history works. It allows them to combine the skills they learned throughout the course. In general, I have been satisfied with their performance on the research papers. They have demonstrated an adequate ability to conduct research in the library and online, then analyze that evidence into an organized paper. A few papers excelled in all parts of the assignment, whereas other papers reflected minimal effort. The main issues surrounding research papers include: 1) difficulty in distinguishing between primary and secondary sources; 2) developing a clear thesis; 3) poor writing. I continue to refine the instructions for the assignment each semester, but I am convinced that the research papers are an integral part of my Methodology class.

The final writing assignment includes a book review. The first semester I allowed them to choose a book in any field, but I found the end result rather chaotic. My lack of familiarity with many of the books made it difficult for me to assess their reviews (other than looking at writing style and organization). The second semester I provided them with a list of 40 books from my particularly field of study, and this helped me to effectively assess their papers. In general, their grades indicate that students have a better ability to review a secondary source than analyze a primary source document. I will follow a similar strategy the next time I teach a Methodology course.

### Recommendations

1. Since the term historiography proves problematic, we need to continue working with students on how to define the term and discuss its impact on historical scholarship. It should also be a term that we address in other courses beyond Methodology and Senior Seminar.

2. A good number of students (almost half) were juniors or seniors. This is far too late for them to be taking Methodology because they should be learning the skills of history before they take their upper-division courses. Now that we are offering two sections each semester and one in the summer, that should help with the backlog of students needing to take the course.

3. Be sure to address online sources in Methodology. Since our library is turning to more online databases and we are now in the era of digitizing sources, we need to make this a part of the course. I have addressed this in past classes by having students attend a library class, but I could do more to address online issues in the classroom.

4. Emphasize various aspects of writing. The consensus of those teaching Methodology has been to spend more class time developing writing skills.

## **SECTION II: Historiography-Based Seminar**

Offered last fall, the class examined the historiography of the Tudor-Stuart era. We focused on three topics: the Reformation, Elizabeth and religious minorities, and the English Civil War. Each topic began with two background lectures. We then spent four or five weeks discussing the readings. I had the students purchase four monographs; the rest of the readings (articles, chapters in collected volumes, monograph excerpts) were placed on electronic reserve. On average, we read about 250-300 pages a week. Each of the reserve readings was assigned to a student who was required to place a brief summary on the class CourseDen site. That student was also expected to play a key role in the discussion of that reading. The students wrote three 6-8 page papers, one of which was revised and expanded to 12-15 pages.

On the whole, I was quite happy with the quality and quantity of discussion, but student interest and energy definitely flagged as the semester wore on and as their responsibilities in other classes increased.

In addition to the standard evaluation form I also asked the students to take an informal survey. The questions I asked were: What did you like best about this class? What did you like least? What would you change about this class? Students most enjoyed the vigorous and detailed class discussions. They least enjoyed the large amount of reading. The things they would change (aside from less reading) included more assignments, more background information, and a fuller discussion of how to write historiography papers.

I would especially recommend this last point to anyone planning on teaching the class. I spent some time on this and provided a guide, but it was not enough. If I taught the class again I would spend an entire class just on writing historiographical essays that included going through several examples. I would also lighten the reading load a bit and be sure that each of the topics discussed had very clear and competing interpretations. My second topic was somewhat amorphous and the divides between various historians less clear than with the first and third topics. The students struggled a bit as a result.

## **SECTION III: Senior Seminar**

### **A. Spring 2010 by Dr. Schroer**

## Summary

Twenty-two students completed papers in spring 2010. The overall assessment of those papers according to the rubric specified in the assessment plan was:

Excellent	0
Good	14
Satisfactory	6
Unsatisfactory	2

### **Ability to cite sources properly**

All papers in the course adhered to the principles of academic honesty. There were problems in several papers with formatting citations.

### **Ability to demonstrate in-depth knowledge of a particular historical question**

The papers generally showed good command of the facts pertaining to their historical questions.

### **Ability to recognize and to pose significant historical questions**

Nearly all of the students explicitly stated a clear, significant historical question.

### **Ability to find useful primary and secondary sources**

Many of the papers demonstrated little effort to identify the most significant secondary sources relevant to their question. Several students did not demonstrate the ability to locate or to think creatively about primary sources. The finished products amounted to good, but not excellent, performance in this area. Some students disregarded instruction to engage with particular sources.

### **Ability to analyze sources critically**

Students showed some weakness in their ability to critically analyze sources. Some students accepted sources without questioning their accuracy.

### **Ability to write and to speak clearly**

The quality of the writing varied considerably. The oral presentations were noticeably improved over prior semesters. Many of the students closely followed the example of a model presentation given by a former student early in the semester and gave strong oral presentations.

### **Ability to construct a persuasive historical argument based on evidence**

Only one paper failed to articulate a thesis. There were many cases in which the paper was not as tightly focused as it could have been. Some students seem to feel compelled to include material in their papers when they have done the research, regardless of its relevance to the

paper's question. The greatest weakness of the papers in this group was poor use of evidence to support their arguments.

### **Ability to think historically**

On balance the papers were reasonably good. Nearly all of the papers attempted to place their arguments in historiographical context. The discussions of historiography were generally in need of greater focus on the precise question at hand.

### Assessment of reflective papers in Senior Seminar Spring 2010

The assignment calls on students to answer the question: What have you learned at the University of West Georgia? I did not coach the students on what to write about. I explained that it was meant to be broad so that students would reflect for themselves on what they regarded as the most important things they had learned. Some students expressed dissatisfaction with the broad scope of the question. (One student wrote that he regarded the question as "a loaded question.")

Students emphasize the acquisition of skills and write virtually nothing about the content matter of history courses. One student wrote that she had "collected a smorgasbord of facts and historical information that will be useful as I prepare to teach high school students," but she believed that she learned her "most valuable lesson," the ability to analyze evidence, from research papers. She wrote that she has learned to evaluate sources critically and "to scrutinize the source's sources." Finally, she wrote that her "history classes at West Georgia may not have prepared me with the exact information I will need to teach, but I am well equipped with the ability to find that information, and formulate an outline, a lecture, a PowerPoint, or some way to relate it to my students." Another student wrote that he "learned the power of reading primarily [sic] documents. Those documents allow the reader to receive information from those who witnessed the history being made." Another student wrote that he learned how to research and write papers at UWG, a skill that he plans to use after college in working in a corporation's research division. Another student wrote, "[B]y studying history in depth I have become more empathetic. History forces one to place himself in the shoes of those who lived in the past, to understand how they thought, why they did what they did." Many students emphasize that they have learned the importance of time management.

One student who minored in sociology wrote eloquently that she has learned that people in the United States do not enjoy equality of opportunity. Her sociology courses played a crucial role in this, but she also credits her history courses with opening her eyes to how inequality has structured people's lives in the past.

Some students offered suggestions for improvements. One student wrote that she "would like to see a historiography class offered." She said it took time to learn "how to write a historiography section." This same student wrote that she wished that more courses were offered.

One student offered his thoughts about online instruction. He expressed a preference for classes that offer a mix of online and traditional instruction. He wrote, "I also learned that . . . online classes save time but do not offer the same level of participation and education as normal classes but

having classes that do both offer the best of both. I really like classes that have online and on campus meetings. I had one class that met half the time online and the other half on campus and I thought that was a great approach.” This same student thought that his survey courses were “too easy in my opinion and too much like high school. They do not relate with the higher-level classes most of the time because the work the teachers give is more like busy work than work to advance you in college.”

## **B. Fall 2010 by Dr. E. MacKinnon**

### **Summary**

Twelve students completed papers in fall 2010. The overall assessment of those papers according to the rubric specified in the assessment plan was:

Excellent	0
Good	6
Satisfactory	5
Unsatisfactory	1

### **Ability to cite sources properly**

All papers in the course adhered to the principles of academic honesty. There were problems in several papers with formatting citations.

### **Ability to demonstrate in-depth knowledge of a particular historical question**

The papers generally showed good command of the facts pertaining to their historical questions. Two papers did not develop much contextualization for the historical questions they were examining.

### **Ability to recognize and to pose significant historical questions**

All of the students explicitly stated a clear, significant historical question.

### **Ability to find useful primary and secondary sources**

As with the spring papers, I agree that most of the papers demonstrated little effort to identify the most significant secondary sources relevant to their question. Most failed to meet with recommended faculty members, and did not include in their bibliographies more recent works. They have an uncanny ability to fixate on one or two sources, and often these were published multiple decades ago. Several students demonstrated little effort to locate or analyze creatively primary sources related to their question. They seem to go through the motions of identifying primary sources and only add in some discussion of one or two in order to meet the requirements. I am very dismayed by their lack of understanding or appreciation for the significance of primary sources as reflected in their papers; they grasp in theory the importance of primary documents but do not demonstrate much skill in incorporating primary source analysis into their examination of their historical question. They do not seem to try very hard to locate relevant documentary sources.

The papers demonstrated either adequate or good performance of this outcome. One student relied almost solely on primary sources used in a class taken previously.

### **Ability to analyze sources critically**

Students showed definite weaknesses in their ability to critically analyze sources. Few papers discussed methodological issues or how to account for biases and limitations in the sources being used.

### **Ability to write and to speak clearly**

The quality of the writing varied considerably. As with the spring semester class, I felt that the students performed reasonably well with the oral presentations, and I noted clear improvement for some from the primary source presentation to the final oral presentation. All of the students were pretty comfortable speaking in front of their peers. Several did a noticeably better job in the oral presentation of organizing main points and applying evidence towards an argument than they did in their papers. At least two of the papers were extremely well written in terms of style, organization, and grammar, but felt short in terms of originality and depth of analysis. The papers also suffered from inconsistent use of past tense and a tendency towards passive rather than active voice.

### **Ability to construct a persuasive historical argument based on evidence**

I was not pleased overall with the ability or effort of these students to pose concrete arguments. Several papers did advance a specific argument, but most were vague and not posited at the beginning, despite having been guided towards this in the draft of their introductions. As with the spring papers, I felt that the greatest weakness of the papers definitely lay in the students' failure to provide substantive evidence to prove a specific argument. Some did not carry through the research necessary to provide a persuasive argument. They did not gather enough evidence to present and substantiate the different nuances of their argument. They just found a few sources that they could posit in the paper, and considered this enough to draw their conclusions, or they substantiated one part of their argument and then stopped. For many students, once they get to fifteen pages they are content to stop writing, even if they have not worked out all sides to their argument.

### **Ability to think historically**

The papers demonstrated in general an ability to think in historical terms, though for one or two I had to guide them away from a more sociological approach or from questions that were not reasonably answerable on the basis of historical evidence. Most of the papers attempted to provide the historiographical context, but students still struggled with understanding the purpose of providing this in the paper. Many sought primarily to provide a summary of books without relating them to the question they were asking, and without identifying multiple or competing interpretive approaches. One student who was taking the historiography-based seminar commented on how it helped him to do the historiography section, and he wrote one of the strongest historiographical discussions in the class.

### Assessment of reflective papers in Senior Seminar Fall 2010

The assignment calls on students to answer the question: What have you learned at the University of West Georgia? I left it open for them to approach in whatever way they wished without providing much guidance. I told them to focus primarily on their experiences as a history major, as opposed to their university experience in general. Only one student seemed to bristle at the assignment and expressed doubt that it would have much impact.

The writing quality of the papers was generally quite high; the prose is smooth and there are few grammatical errors. Students are able to organize their points quite effectively. I enjoyed reading through these, particularly since for the most part they were very positive.

Overall, the students considered their experiences as history majors to have been positive and rewarding. The students commented most frequently on the enthusiasm, passion, and caring attitude of their history professors. No one referenced by name any professor that they had found to be difficult or abrasive. Several had become history majors after starting majors in other departments and each commented on how much more attentive and caring their history professors were than those in their first major. Several praised the personal attention and commented on the quality of the advising done by the department. One student praised the professionalism and discipline of his history classes as opposed to those taken from other departments.

Several praised the broad range of course offerings, though several others registered a desire to see more courses taught on medieval and early modern Europe. One noted that he was pleased that we now have someone to teach ancient history.

A number of the students declared that what they gained the most from, and valued, was their development of critical thinking, reading and writing skills. One noted how challenged he had been by the requirement to learn a foreign language, but then went on to say how proud he was that he had accomplished this. Several noted the value of the methodology class they had taken for preparing them for upper level courses in history.

Some students offered suggestions for improvements. One student suggested that the history department take over management of the secondary education classes. He had a negative experience with the College of Education and said he was envious of his classmates in English who were able to take education courses taught by their English professors. One suggested doing what Professor Popov-Reynolds will be doing in the fall, teaching Latin for history majors. One hoped that we will expand our course offerings and offer courses more than once in a two or three year cycle.

Only one essay was more negative than positive. This student was very disheartened by his experience as a history major and did not feel that his classes had prepared him for much of anything. He said they had been very stressful and did not contribute much to preparing him for any concrete career. He noted positively only one class he had taken on archival practice, and felt that this was the only one to teach him a relevant skill.

To improve mastery of our learning outcomes, I will recommend the following:

Continue to emphasize research and writing skills in all of our undergraduate upper level classes

Continue to offer seminars that focus on historiography of particular historical topics and debates

Encourage department members to incorporate historiographical assignments into upper level content courses, possibly through book review essays or required historiographical components for research papers

Consider moving to an assessment system that tracks individual levels of improvement from methodology through senior seminar, possibly a portfolio of papers that a student would be required to put together and be evaluated before graduation