

Assessment Report for Undergraduate Education 2011

The following assessment report is divided into six sections. The first section consists of assessment reports by the instructors of History 2302, The Historians' Craft: Methodology. The second section assesses the Junior Historiography course taught in 2011. The third section assesses the work of students taking HIST 4485 Senior Seminar. The fourth summarizes results collected in January 2011 from an alumni survey conducted by Dr. Dan Williams. The fifth section collects results from the four core survey assessments. The final section offers recommendations. On balance, student learning has been improving, but considerable room for improvement remains.

SECTION I: Methodology

Spring 2011 Elaine MacKinnon

Assessment examinations

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.*

As in the past, the most frequently cited reason for choosing to major in history was a long-standing love of the subject and a desire to teach. Several discussed how history is the means for understanding why things are the way they are, and how we can learn to improve. Several said that they chose history because it was their best subject, or that a particular professor had inspired them. One credited his high school history teachers. One student said that it was his experience in the military that led him to want to study history, especially his exposure to different cultures. In this class I had a high number of students planning to teach history in high school following graduation.

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.*

I was impressed with the understanding many had of the historical process. They discussed the gathering of evidence and analysis of sources as critical for studying the past. I felt as in past semesters the answers reflect a well-developed ability to think historically. I could tell that numerous students had taken upper-level courses before taking this methodology course. One student composed an interesting response stating that what he had learned about the writing of history was that it could be distorted, and much information is often left out. He cited the example of Woodrow Wilson being considered a great president despite the fact that he allegedly was in the KKK (the student said that he had come across "links" claiming this).

Diplomatic, military history and American history in general were the major areas of interest expressed by these students. Several students declared an interest in ancient history and one gave Middle Eastern history as his favorite subject.

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

historiography

plagiarism

bias

Most of the examinations correctly defined plagiarism, though as we got into more specific exercises identifying plagiarism later in the semester, many could not recognize it. Almost none of the exams correctly defined historiography, though one said that it was the study of history and one stated that it involved the interpretation and reinterpretation of history. The students seem to understand the concept of bias in historical writing.

4. Write a brief essay on a historical question of your choosing. Try to be as specific as possible in your essay.

As in the past, the responses to this question varied, though most posed questions related to American history. I thought that the majority of the students posed solid historical questions, though the answers were not as high in quality. One of the strongest essays was a response to the question of why the Vietnam War is considered to be a failure by historians; the student had already taken the Vietnam War course so had been well prepared to answer this. Another student posed the question of why the United States entered Vietnam. One student posed a question about the Enlightenment and then provided a rather thorough essay response seemingly on the basis of the survey course. One student asked a counterfactual question about an Al Gore presidency.

Papers: Spring 2011

The sample of papers comprised ten papers, including the paper receiving the lowest grade (75) and the highest grade (98) in the course on the assignment among papers submitted on time. The papers were read and scored on a score of 1 to 4 according the rubric below. I indicate the average score for the ten papers.

1. Does the paper offer a clear, persuasive thesis making a historical claim worth arguing about?

No	Poorly	Adequately	Absolutely
		3	

2. Does the paper cite its sources correctly?

No	Poorly	Adequately	Absolutely
		2.7	

3. Does the paper sustain its thesis with evidence from the source?

No	Poorly	Adequately	Absolutely
			3.3

4. Is the paper written clearly and persuasively?

No	Poorly	Adequately	Absolutely
		3	

5. Does the paper demonstrate an ability to think historically?

No	Poorly	Adequately	Absolutely
			3.1

Overall I thought this was a strong group of students; there were several who showed outstanding analytical and writing skills. The papers they wrote for this assignment were generally well organized and demonstrated at least an effort to back up points with concrete evidence. Most papers articulated a thesis statement, though some continued to confuse the purpose of the paper with the argument of the paper. The students thought that it was enough just to say what the paper would be examining, rather than stating specifically what point the paper would make and then substantiate. The scores listed above may seem high, but the paper I assessed was one that may have been easier for them to write. This paper required them to analyze a work of historical fiction, and students may be more adept at understanding the need to back up a point with a reference to a character or a scene than they are to a primary source document, artifact, etc. If I had assessed the papers they had written which required them to analyze a primary source document, then the average scores would be lower. On those papers I found that the students were able to summarize the documents quite well, but they really faltered when it came to explaining the historical significance, or identifying a particular issue which the document could be used to examine. Very few were able to do this in any depth, nor did they seem to understand why they should be doing that. They seemed to assume that a primary source has significance in and of itself. I had continuing problems with their inability to use proper citations, and to use proper punctuation. We worked a lot on the differences between formulating an argument for a paper and stating a purpose for the paper, but students continued to struggle with the articulation of a thesis. I would say that the two biggest weaknesses I noticed in student papers, besides poor grammar and sloppiness, were the ability to state an argument, and the ability to analyze primary sources to substantiate an argument. These are the skills that we need to continue to work on with students and develop assignments to help them improve their writing.

Summer and Fall 2011

Keith S. Hébert

Assessment examination

During Session II of the Summer Semester of 2011, I taught HIST 2302: The Historian’s Craft: Methodology. This was the second time that I taught this course. The class met twice weekly for 2.5 hours per meeting for eight weeks. This course is especially well-suited for the condensed summer session. The students benefit from the condensed schedule. With only 16 class sessions, students had assignments due each meeting. The assigned reading loads 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 12-15 hours and simply could not keep up with the workload. Our department advisors try to dissuade students from enrolling in too many summer courses, but many ignore this advice

to their own detriment. Of the 20 students who completed the course, 15 were history majors. Other academic majors represented in the course included: psychology, mass communications, anthropology, and political science. I enjoy having these different perspectives in the classroom.

During the Fall 2011 semester, I taught two sections of historical methods. Surprisingly, one of the sections had fewer than ten history majors. There were as many political science and psychology majors in the course as history majors. This presented a major problem given that the bulk of the course is designed to help students become better historians. Many students who are uninterested in becoming a historian became disinterested in some of the specific content throughout the semester because they felt it did not apply to their major. Rather than being interested in learning how to think like a historian, many students were more interested in learning how to think like a historian as long as it applies to my chosen field of study.

I administered the assessment exam during the first class meeting. Students appeared to take the exam 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 or athletic coach. 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. One student stated that history will help us learn from the past in order to avoid future mistakes.

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. So in many ways, the study of history provides our students with an opportunity to broaden their horizons and experience people and places in parts of the world that they will likely never see. One of the textbooks I use in this course, John Gaddis, *The Landscape of History*, argues that one of the main attractions that history possesses is the ability to transport us in time and place to locations of our choosing. UWG students understand this concept well.

When asked to define historiography, students responded with a variety of understandings. One student commented that historiography “is the term used when describing history.” Another wrote that historiography “is a lot like scientific classifications or taxonomies.” 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 differing 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 cheating.” 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, students 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 that has reappeared each semester in my methods courses.

When asked to write a brief essay on a historical question of your choosing, students by-and-large selected topics that interested them and ones that they later chose for their semester research papers. Examples of historical questions that students selected were: “How did German immigrants assimilate in America?”; “How did Peter the Great’s childhood influence his reign?”; “Why did the South lose the Civil War?”; “Why did slavery develop when it did?” 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 North Korea 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.

Overall, the methods course is a slow learning process filled with numerous opportunities for improvement and reassessment. Most of the students made marked progress during the semester.

Primary Source Analysis Paper

During the Summer and Fall 2011 semesters students enrolled in my Historical Methods course were required to complete a series of assignments that asked them to identify and locate a primary source and to analyze that source. All students in my Historical Methods course prepare a 10-page primary source-based research paper. I have incorporated the primary source analysis exercise into the scaffolding that I have constructed as students complete the larger assignment. Students are asked to write three brief primary source analytical papers prior to submitting their final research paper. They are also expected to incorporate these analytical papers into their larger final paper.

Did the students assert a thesis making a historical claim worth arguing about?

As a whole, approximately 60 percent of the students enrolled in my Historical Methods courses struggle to understand what a thesis is, how to construct an argument, and

the relationship that primary sources play in interpreting the past. On every assignment I ask students to put their thesis in bold faced print. Many students highlighted sections of text that failed to identify their paper's thesis. For example, one student, who otherwise was an exceptional writer and came prepared for class on a regular basis, wrote "The sinking of the U.S.S. Maine in Havana [sic] started the Spanish American War." Another student wrote "The lynching of Sam Hose was horrific and represented the prevailing racism that existed in the American South." Another wrote "Mandeville Mills is a nice play to live because it is a historic building that has been converted into loft apartments." Sometimes students created arguments that simply lacked either the support of primary sources or evidenced a general misunderstanding of history. For example, one student wrote "Title IX has been a failure because of the unfair financial burden that this legislation placed upon income generating collegiate sports such as men's football and basketball." The essay failed to note that since Title IX's passage the percentage of women enrolled in major universities nationwide has experienced a significant increase. The paper also failed to mention that the majority of collegiate football programs lose money annually.

Overall, I think the problems that students have with identifying a thesis and identifying what constitutes a meaningful argument/ historical claim derives from their lack of understanding of historiography. Unfortunately, most of our students have only read history as presented in textbooks and popular works prior to enrolling in this Historical Methods course. The vast majority of students fail to realize that even in course lectures they are receiving an interpretation as understood and presented by their course professor. Too many of our students are searching for "the history" of a particular subject rather than grappling with "a history" of a particular subject. I think this problem needs to be resolved or addressed at the survey course level.

Can students cite sources correctly?

Overall, students improve their abilities to properly cite sources throughout a semester-length course. Most students are completely unaware that historians have a standard manner for citing sources. Most want to use MLA or APA citation styles because they have been exposed to them in their English Composition and social sciences courses. Some resist adopting the Chicago Manual of Style. Every semester that I have taught Historical Methods I have had at least one student turn in their primary source analysis paper or final research paper having used the MLA method for citing sources. When asked why they choose to ignore the assignment's directions, the students typically reply that what I had asked them to do was too unfamiliar. I typically spend small portions of numerous classes throughout the semester covering various aspects of citation methods. The biggest problem tends to be that students fail to understand the relationship between a scholar's endnotes and the general quality of their research. Ten page research papers with a total of 8 endnotes (half of which are Ibids) evidence a lack of understanding among students about the rigors of historical research. Out of the 52 research papers that I graded during the summer and fall semester, approximately half failed to identify the required number of primary and secondary sources. About 20 percent of these papers failed to include both internal citations and a bibliography—despite these specific assignment requirements.

Overall, I think students can be taught the mechanics of properly citing their sources, but struggle to understand the relationship between lots of good sources and a sound research paper. Again, some of this comes back to a lack of understanding of historiography. For example, one student completed a primary source analysis of a political

cartoon that depicted President Abraham Lincoln as an ape-like creature holding Washington D.C. captive. In the student's internal citations, she identified only a single Lincoln biography (odd since Lincoln is second to only Jesus Christ in the total number of historical biographies) and the one she included had been published in 1955. Perhaps at the survey course level professors could introduce more secondary sources to help students understand the breadth of historical literature.

Can students sustain the thesis with evidence from the source?

Most students locate appropriate primary sources, but struggle to integrate those sources into their essays in a proper fashion. For most students in my courses the integration of primary sources is either feast or famine. On one hand, students believe that including massive block quoted passages constitutes integrating primary sources into their work. Most of these block quote passages are filled with unnecessary information that fails to add a lot of substance to the author's central argument. For example, in one essay a student chose to evaluate Lincoln's 1861 Inaugural Address. Rather than selectively incorporating choice phrases from this historic speech, the student included the entire speech in two-and-a-half pages of block quoted paragraphs. On the other hand, several students struggled to understand that you have to do more than merely cite a primary source in your endnotes. One student examines F.D.R.'s famous Four Freedoms Speech yet failed to incorporate any of the speech's moving passages into the paper. The student made a meaningful argument that the speech represented a turning point in American conceptions of freedom, but failed to really use the speech as evidence for this conclusion.

Can students write clearly and persuasively?

Writing is a major problem for the majority of students enrolled in Historical Methods. To address these problems, I incorporate numerous exercises taken from Strunk and White and the Chicago Manual of Style into my daily course activities. Overall, students usually improve their ability to use the active voice and to write in a consistent tense by the end of the semester. Students struggle with organizing their thoughts. As part of the course, students have to create an outline for their primary source research paper, but many do not spend enough time thinking about this assignment before submission. The outlines evidence a general lack of organizational skill among our students. This lack of organization significantly hampers a student's ability to present a clear and persuasive argument. Most of the papers suffer from redundant passages and poorly constructed paragraphs that lack cohesion. Throughout the semester, I spend a lot of time working with students on writing effective introductions. They have to revise their introductions on several occasions. Overall, I think students leave the class understanding the significance of a well-written introduction and thesis statement, but struggle to then support this opening with the primary and secondary evidence they have compiled.

Can students think historically?

Students struggle to see the past for the past's sake without clouding it with presentist assumptions. For example, one student commented in an analytical paper that examined a series of Civil War-era political cartoons that "The media presented a biased view of Lincoln's presidency because of its Liberal leanings." The student failed to differentiate the major differences that separate modern and 19th century American

political culture. Some students seem to use history as a means of substantiating their 21st century political views. A student examining documents related to Bacon's Rebellion argued "Nathaniel Bacon was a true American patriot whose spirit inspired Boston patriots to defy the British crown by dumping tea into the harbor."

Students are surrounded by very vocal public figures who make a lot of political statements based upon a supposed understanding of the past. Students struggle to understand that these statements require examination and are subject to interpretation. Unfortunately, I think that this climate has entered the classroom at an alarming rate. I have thought about incorporating some analytical exercises into the classroom that ask to students to substantiate via primary sources many of the historical claims that are commonly presented in public forums.

Section II: Fall 2011 Junior Seminar in Historiography Dr. Popov

The Junior Seminar in Historiography, first offered in the Fall semester of 2010 by Dr. Michael de Nie, aims to provide undergraduate majors with an opportunity to write a substantial work on historiography. Majors have traditionally struggled with the historiography portion of their Senior Seminar papers. Dr. Elaine MacKinnon has, therefore, recommended the creation of the Junior Seminar in Historiography as a way to prepare students more effectively for the Senior Seminar.

In his assessment report on his inaugural incarnation of the course, sent to the department on 1/25/2011, Dr. de Nie explained that he divided his course into three thematic units. Following two background lectures on each unit, the remainder of the class sessions proceeded by discussion. Writing assignments consisted of three 6-8 page papers, one of which the students then revised and expanded into a 12-15 page final paper.

In his report on his course, Dr. de Nie provided several recommendations for future improvements. One of these involved reducing the reading load, since students found it challenging to be able to keep up with the reading. He also recommended including more writing assignments, and spending more class time explaining how to write a historiographical paper.

I took these recommendations to heart in teaching my Junior Seminar in Historiography on the Roman Republic in the Fall semester of 2011. Because of the nature of the topic, a chronological organization was better than a thematic one. I ordered three monographs for the course, as well as the *Blackwell Companion to the Roman Republic*, which contains twenty-nine articles, many of them historiographical in nature, by leading names in the field. Additional articles and book-chapters, as well as several short selections from primary sources were available on CourseDen.

Writing assignments followed a step process, building up to the final historiographical paper. Students wrote five 2-page article reviews, one 3-page book review, one 5-6 page comparative review of two monographs, and a final historiographical essay of 8-12 pages. The final paper required students to use at least three journal articles and three monographs. A complete draft of the final paper was due before Thanksgiving, and the students then had two weeks to revise.

Other than a handful of background lectures interspersed throughout the semester, the class proceeded by discussion format. Several class sessions were devoted to questions of writing. One session was dedicated entirely to the process of writing a book review, and the relationship of book reviews and historiography. The class discussed two book reviews, of which one was a positive review of a book, and the other very negative. Another class session was dedicated to discussing the writing of historiographical essays. Students read two examples of historiographical papers: Nathan Rosenstein's conference paper on the recent historiography of the Roman army, and Brian Holden Reid's chapter from the recent *Blackwell Companion to American Military History*, surveying the historiography of the American Civil War from its inception to the present. Each student in the class was required to meet with me individually in order to discuss his/her final paper and how to approach writing a historiography for the topic selected. Finally, two class periods were devoted to peer-review of the book review and the final historiographical papers respectively.

Overall, students found the readings for the class extremely challenging, but the writing sessions over the course of the semester helped some of them become more critical as readers. This was reflected in the significant improvement in the quality of class discussions in the second half of the semester. The quality of the writing assignments in the class varied dramatically. While most of the class did very well on the papers, and incorporated the suggestions made during the writing sessions, three of the final historiographical essays showed no comprehension whatsoever of what historiography actually is.

If I were to teach this class again, I would substitute one of the monographs with something more readily accessible. In addition, I would assign student presentations on articles, instead of relying on class discussion entirely. Finally, I would make the final historiographical paper due earlier in the semester, so that the students would have more than two weeks to complete the revisions.

SECTION III: Senior Seminar

Dr. E. MacKinnon

With only two junior-level historiography special topics seminars taught, it is difficult at present to draw concrete conclusions as to whether or not participation in these has produced higher quality student discussions of historiography in the Senior Seminar paper. I will be better able to comment on this after the end of this semester, when more students who took the historiography seminars offered in the fall of 2010 and 2011 will have completed their Senior Seminar paper.

Of the students who took the seminar with Dr. de Nie in the fall of 2010, six out of 13 have completed the senior seminar with me; one is currently enrolled, and one has started it but then dropped out. Out of these six who have completed the course, if I assess their understanding and execution of historiography on a scale of 1-4, as used in the Senior Seminar paper assessment, I list the following results:

4: 2

3: 2

2: 2

1: 0

The student who is enrolled in Senior Seminar now turned in the draft of the introduction and historiography section of the paper without any discussion of historiography, which hopefully will be corrected in the final version of the paper.

I would say that the majority of them understood the concept well, but not all were able to apply their understanding and present a thorough survey of the historiography of their topics. I cannot say that they were superior in their understanding to other students in the class, and other students in the class performed just as well in writing an historiographical section. But at least three persons from the class wrote papers that did include a skillful presentation of historiography, though one was not as much in depth as I would have liked. But they knew how to structure an historiographical discussion, and categorize historical approaches and arguments. More time will be needed to determine whether or not students who take the historiographical seminars are more skilled at crafting discussions of historiography. I will say that subjectively, I believe that having students in the class who are already acquainted with what historiography definitely helps advance discussions of it, which may have a salutary effect on those students not as familiar with it. Students who have taken these seminars are more likely to talk in class during discussions of historiography and have been willing to help classmates. When I think about how little understanding the students in my spring 2011 Methodology class had of the term historiography, and where we expect them to be when they are writing the Senior Seminar paper, then I cannot help but reiterate my strong support for continuing and even adding more junior-level seminars that would focus on the historiography of given topics and encourage students to write historiographical papers in which they have to find relevant books and articles themselves and write about the different interpretative trends. We need to do more to get students advanced from the point of understanding they have when taking Methodology to where we want them to be when taking the Senior Seminar.

Quantitative Analysis for Assessment of Senior Seminar Research Paper and Oral Presentations

The sample of papers comprised five papers from each semester. The papers were read and scored on a score of 1 to 4 according the rubric below. I indicate the average score for the ten papers.

1. Ability to cite Sources properly

No	Poorly	Adequately	Absolutely
		3	

2. Ability to demonstrate in-depth knowledge of a particular historical question

No	Poorly	Adequately	Absolutely
			3.3

3. Ability to recognize and to pose significant historical questions

No	Poorly	Adequately	Absolutely
			3.8

4. Ability to find useful primary and secondary sources

No	Poorly	Adequately	Absolutely
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			3.2
5. Ability to analyze sources critically			
No	Poorly	Adequately	Absolutely
		2.7	
6. Ability to write and to speak clearly			
No	Poorly	Adequately	Absolutely
		3	
7. Ability to construct a persuasive historical argument based on evidence			
No	Poorly	Adequately	Absolutely
		2.6	
8. Ability to think historically			
No	Poorly	Adequately	Absolutely
			3.2

Qualitative comments on Senior Seminar Research Papers, Spring and Fall of 2011

The papers from the two semesters were strongest in terms of the quality of the questions being asked, and in the adherence to standards of academic honesty. There were no papers that raised questions of plagiarism, though one was very sloppy in terms of the references used. One raised questions from the second reader as to whether or not the student had used material from a paper written in a previous semester. Of the ten papers sampled, two of the papers failed to adequately state a thesis, whereas three papers offered excellent, well-focused theses. The other papers were adequate. Overall in the two semesters, some of the papers were very thoroughly researched and showed an ability to analyze primary sources at a sophisticated level; on the whole though, the papers were not as thoroughly researched as they should have been. I was disappointed in both semesters with the amount of sources the students used. Several papers were based on a small number of secondary and primary sources and lacked factual development and substantiation. Overall in both semesters, the weakest area was in the quality of the writing and in the ability to construct an historical argument based upon concrete evidence. Below are qualitative comments regarding our learning outcomes based upon the papers written in both semesters.

Ability to cite sources properly

All papers in the course adhered to the principles of academic honesty. However, students continue to struggle with proper footnote and endnote citation style. There were papers that put footnotes into bibliographic format, or did not properly punctuate book and film titles. Students do not seem to understand how to handle sources cited more than once.

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

Most of the papers demonstrated a strong understanding of the context for their historical question; they seem to learn a lot about their topics through their research, which

comes through more in the oral presentation than perhaps in the paper. But I would like to see more fact-based contextualization of their topics. Many of the students were very general in their discussion of historical events or personages relative to their question.

Ability to recognize and to pose significant historical questions

On balance the students were very strong in this area in both semesters. They sometimes have to work hard to get to a relevant historical question, and it takes some discussion with them to articulate why their particular question has historical significance.

Ability to find useful primary and secondary sources

As in past semesters, I was disappointed in the perceived effort of students to identify, obtain, and use relevant secondary sources, particularly more recently published scholarly literature. Students underuse scholarly articles. Students continually complain that they cannot find relevant materials but then do not come for assistance either to me or to other faculty. I do not think that students take full advantage of the resources the library offers. I tried to encourage several students to travel to Emory or to UGA to use materials relative to their topic, but they did not appear to have done so.

I do think, though, that over time information literacy is improving, and I saw some of the students making better use of primary source internet sites and databases. But, I am still continually surprised at how few students make full use of the many databases available through the library. There were, however, several papers in each semester that made excellent use of internet newspaper sites as well as sites holding government documents, files, diaries, letters, etc.

Ability to analyze sources critically

Students continue to show weakness in their ability to critically analyze sources. On the whole, the papers were weaker than I would like to see in the students' ability to use primary sources as the basis for their analysis of key points. They did not show skill in presenting primary sources as an evidentiary base for their arguments, but rather seemed to be trying simply to get them into the paper because it is a requirement. Several students had collected excellent examples of primary sources, but were weak in fleshing out all of the analytical insights that were there. Students are reluctant to engage with the meaning of a source beyond just summarizing it. They use sources without questioning their accuracy, and they do not seek to engage with sources that may contradict their argument. I try to get them to understand that for every source they are analyzing in the paper, they need to assess the viability and credibility of the material for answering their question. They need to consider the limitations of the source and provide evidence to corroborate their use of it. But few of the papers attempted to do this.

Ability to write and to speak clearly

The writing of the papers continues to be the greatest weakness of the students. The papers' writing ranges in quality from excellent to awful. I was appalled to see how many grammatical errors there were in the final drafts. Some of the papers did not articulate points clearly or were not cohesive in the construction of the argument. Students

tended to over generalize and use the passive rather than the active voice. There were papers in each semester that lacked solid conclusions.

I thought that overall the oral presentations were strong in terms of students' ability to organize their points and their ease in speaking before an audience. Several students did outstanding presentations. In the fall semester a number of students went under the expected time limit for the primary source presentation but met the standard for the final oral presentation. For the primary source presentation, the most frequent criticism was the failure to provide an in-depth analysis of the source and how it would be used in the paper.

Ability to construct a persuasive historical argument based on evidence

For the most part, students in both semesters attempted to construct a thesis which they then tried to substantiate. Several papers did not clearly articulate or pursue a thesis, though they stated a purpose. There were in each semester some outstanding papers in terms of the argument posed and the evidence examined to substantiate it. There were many cases in which the paper was not as tightly focused as it could have been. Several of the students did not seem to have tried very hard to find persuasive evidence to back and illustrate points. Several lost track of their argument in the course of the paper. Many papers were weak in the presentation and analysis of evidence for the argument.

Ability to think historically

On balance the papers were reasonably good and demonstrated a strong ability to think historically without moralizing or engaging in anachronistic thinking. All of the papers attempted to place their arguments in historiographical context, but few did so thoroughly. But, I have seen progress in student understanding of what historiography is, and some have become quite skilled in it. Nonetheless, overall students still struggle with the need to examine what other historians have written about their topic, and they resist having to categorize the literature. They continue to use the historiography section to summarize the secondary literature they will use in the paper. As in past semesters, the discussions of historiography were often overly general and not focused on the precise question at hand.

Senior Seminar: The Reflective Essay

Students in the course were required to write a reflective essay of 2-3 pages in length addressing the following question: What have you learned during your time as a student at West Georgia? The papers were graded and counted for 5 percent of the course grade. 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.

The quality of the papers as in the past was quite high, though several students wrote less than two pages. Students seemed to value the opportunity to reflect on their experiences at West Georgia, and most take the assignment seriously. Several of the essays reflected on what the students had learned about the discipline of history, and the students displayed a solid understanding of what it means to be an historian. Many emphasized the importance of learning to think critically and to verify the sources of information; several praised their history courses for helping them to probe more deeply into issues and into their readings, and to ask questions. They noted as well that they believed themselves to have learned how to construct an argument and to gather evidence that could substantiate their points. In fact, as I read over them again for doing this report, it struck me how many

students noted positively that they had become better researchers and writers of analytical prose. They seem to have a better grasp in theory of what they are supposed to be doing than is evident in their finished products, though. One student insisted “One of the skills I have learned that can be used in virtually any field is the ability to communicate my ideas effectively through writing. I have had other courses at West Georgia where writing was required but never to the extent of that in the history program.” Several students singled out their courses on methodology as being particularly instrumental in teaching them how to write and in facilitating their success in upper-level courses. Several also praised their historiography seminars and definitely called for more of these types of courses.

Virtually all of the students praised the department and individual faculty members for their teaching and their general commitment to students. Some talk about their favorite courses and what particular materials or topics inspired them to major in history. As in the past, students seem to appreciate the intelligence of department members, their passion for history, their skills as teachers and lecturers, their accessibility, and their willingness to work with students to improve their skills. Some of the students also noted that they had to learn time-management skills and were now more disciplined in their approach. I am also pleased to note that several students praised how their coursework had opened their eyes to the broader world, and one even talked of how she was inspired to go out into the world not just to study it, but to try and make it better. Several students also praised the increasing numbers of courses available in such areas as archival research, digitalized sources and technology, etc. They appreciated the ability to develop concrete skills that could give them more options after graduation. Many students also emphasized the importance of the friendships they had made with fellow history students, and how gratifying it was to learn that they were not the only “history nerds” in the world. They felt that being in the department had enabled them to develop solid relationships with both their peers and their professors. Several praised how well prepared they felt for the next stages in their lives, whether going on to graduate school or seeking employment. A number of the students also reflected on how they had had to struggle throughout their time in college with family obligations, jobs, personal crises, and that they had appreciated the support given to them by faculty.

There actually were not many criticisms raised in either semester. This may be due to the nature of the assignment, given that they receive a grade for this. We may want to revisit whether they should be graded, though we would have to still require the paper if we have any hopes of getting a solid mass of them per semester. I tried in each semester to reassure students that we need for them to appraise honestly their experience in the program, but I have no way of knowing whether they truly are confident that they can write negative comments and still receive the desired grade. That said, several students in each semester did comment negatively on the low number of upper-level courses being offered. They called for more upper levels, more variety in these courses, and for more thematically-based, specific course topics. One student argued strongly for courses on Native Americans and for more area-studies programs. Another student complained about the lack of courses in Middle Eastern history and in early modern Europe. One student advocated for a course that would examine world religions and their origins. One student rather obtusely commented on how little he had learned in his classes, but was very vague in explaining to what he was attributing this. He seemed to praise the professors, but still feel that he could never live up to expectations. Another student complained that she had not been challenged in many of her upper-level courses and called for more consistency in the rigor of departmental offerings. She claimed to have not been required to write a research paper

until the Senior Seminar. One student complained that undergraduate and graduate student combined courses were not fulfilling for either group and suggested more 3000-level courses. Several students complained about having to learn a foreign language, though one qualified this by saying the real problem lay in not having enough offerings at the lower levels of the language and not being adequately advised that the 2001 and 2002-levels were what were required for the major.

In general, as in past semesters, the writing was clearer and freer of errors than in the research papers. Students appear very comfortable when they are writing more personally and in their own voice. I echo what Dr. Schroer has written in past reports: "The essays seem to offer an especially clear, frank, and personal expression of the students' views. Our students appear as a thoughtful and likeable group in their reflective essays. I encourage faculty members to read them."

Section IV: Core Courses

A. HIST 1111

Dr. Charles Lipp

Overview:

In the Fall 2011 semester, I assessed my two sections of World Civilizations 1 (HIST 1111 04 and 05) on the basis of the following Georgia Board of Regents approved learning outcome:

- Students will demonstrate the ability to understand the political, social, economic, or cultural dimensions of world history.

This past semester, I also established several related learning outcomes particular to my sections for students who completed the class successfully. They were:

- Students will demonstrate introductory knowledge of pivotal trends and issues in global history.
- Students will demonstrate improved abilities in processing and analyzing information from historical sources.
- Students will demonstrate improved skills at crafting written arguments based on information from historical sources.

In order to assess student achievement, I used the following writing-based instrument:

- Craft a well-organized and well-argued essay responding to the question below.

Your essay must be in proper format, meaning it must have an introduction that states a clear argument and how you intend to prove it, a series of body paragraphs that use evidence from readings and lecture to support your argument, and a conclusion that restates your argument and its broader significance.

The question:

By 1500 both China and the Muslim World were leading global powers in terms of politics, society, economics, and culture. Western Europe seemed to be lacking in material terms in comparison. What political, social, economic, and cultural factors contributed to the rise in prominence of EITHER China OR the Muslim World in comparison to medieval western Europe and how did those factors contribute to that rise.

In your answer, make sure to use direct evidence from lectures and readings.

Students crafted essays responding to the above question as part of their final exam. Their responses were evaluated first on a 60-point scale, thus establishing a raw score. That score was then broken down into a three point scale as follows: 1-41 = 1 (did not meet expectations); 21-53 = 2 (met expectations); and 54-60 = 3 (exceeded expectations). This 1-3 scale founded upon expectations is based on the Georgia Board of Regents approved assessment regime for E-Core World Civilizations surveys. I chose to adopt the Board of Regents' approved methodology for several reasons, including: 1) the fact that the methodology was state approved; and, 2) it allows for useful points of comparison between sections taught on-campus and those taught in the E-Core system, which will help inform conversations as we move forward evaluating how to best approach the World Civilizations survey class.

Results may be found on the next page.

Results:

Section 04

Student	Raw Grade	Rubric
1	54	3
2	54	3
3	52	2
4	60	3
5	45	2
6	54	3
7	54	3
8	45	2
9	44	2
10	51	2
11	57	3
12	48	2
13	54	3
14	60	3
15	42	2
16	48	2
17	44	2
18	40	2
19	42	2
20	53	2
21	45	2
22	41	1
23	42	2
24	43	2
25	41	1
26	40	1
27	41	1
28	42	2
29	41	1
30	41	1
31	41	1
32	41	1
Rubric	Instances	Percentage
3	7	22.5
2	15	48.3
1	9	29

Note: Several students elected not to participate by not taking the exam.

Section 05

Student	Raw Grade	Rubric
1	53	2
2	54	3
3	48	2
4	52	2
5	51	2
6	50	2
7	48	2
8	30	1
9	53	2
10	52	2
11	47	2
12	42	2
13	55	3
14	54	3
15	42	2
16	53	2
17	43	2
18	52	2
19	49	2
20	50	2
21	44	2
22	53	2
23	47	2
24	53	2
25	47	2
26	52	2
27	42	2
Rubric	Instances	Percentage
3	3	11.1
2	23	85.1
1	1	3.7

Application of Results:

I will be sharing these results with the History Department's HIST 1111 Survey Assessment Committee (SAC). I plan to monitor student performance in my upcoming sections using a similar assessment instrument and the same basic rubric.

B. HIST 1112

Spring 2011

Exemplary (90-100 percent)	5 percent
Proficient (70-89 percent)	27 percent
Developing/ Does Not Meet Expectations (60-69 percent)	32 percent
Unacceptable (below 60 percent)	36 percent

Planned improvement: This semester represents the first time this common assessment instrument was administered in HIST 1112. It provides a useful beginning. The faculty members are re-evaluating the instrument. The instructor in the course will work this semester to clarify the material for students in class. In addition, the faculty are evaluating methods for better motivating students to complete the required work in the course.

Fall 2011

Exemplary (90-100 percent)	5 percent
Proficient (70-89 percent)	24 percent
Developing/ Does Not Meet Expectations (60-69 percent)	21 percent
Unacceptable (below 60 percent)	50 percent

Planned improvement: Instruction will focus more carefully on the material over which the students will be assessed.

C. HIST 2111

Spring 2011

The assessment was given to three sections of survey with a total of 254 students.

Exemplary (90-100 percent)	8 percent
Proficient (70-89 percent)	28 percent
Developing/Does Not Meet Expectations (60-69 percent)-	38 percent
Unacceptable (below 60 percent)-	26 percent

Planned Improvements: This is the first semester that the Department of History has assessed any course in the HIST 2111 block. So far, we find that the assessment clearly shows that the students do better on the multiple choice section of the quiz than on the essay section. Therefore, this leads us to believe that while students grasp the basics of each narrative that they read, analysis of the overall themes and meanings behind those readings prove to be a bit more difficult despite the instructors' attempt at discussing the readings before the quizzes take place. At this time there is no plan to re-evaluate the instruments used for assessment, but the instructors are discussing ways to better improve the students' analytical skills.

Fall 2011 Note: This assessment was given to a 2111-Honors section of 16 students
Exemplary 90-100 percent)- 50 percent
Proficient (70-89 percent)- 44 percent
Developing/Does Not Meet Expectations (below 60 percent)- 6%
Unacceptable (below 60 percent)

Planned Improvements: This class was **truly extraordinary** in terms of maturity and ability to understand and engage assigned material. It was the best honor's section the instructor has ever taught. There are no plans for changing the format of the test or difficulty of the assigned text. This test was identical in format and very similar in difficulty to the tests administered to the regular sections of the 2111 survey in the spring of 2011.

D. HIST 2112

SPRING 2011
4=5 percent
3=27 percent
2=42 percent
1=26 percent

Recommended Improvement:
Pedagogy

HIST 2112 instructors will introduce more primary source-based exercises (both oral and written) throughout the semester and incorporate primary source analysis questions into their examinations.

Section V: Alumni Survey

In January 2011 Dr. Dan Williams conducted a survey of UWG alumni who majored in History. This summary of the results was prepared by Tim Schroer. The survey showed a high degree of satisfaction among alumni with their education and a continued confidence in the value of history education at UWG.

UWG History Majors have achieved success in diverse fields. Our students have become teachers, professors, lawyers, administrators in the private sector, military officers, cultural resource managers, and entrepreneurs.

Among the questions that the survey posed was the following:
"Would you recommend majoring in History at the University of West Georgia to a bright high school senior considering colleges? Why or why not?"

We received 46 responses to that question. Five responded negatively, mostly citing poor job prospects for graduates. Six were non-committal or qualified responses. For example, one respondent answered, "Only if they already have an interest in history." (That seems an eminently reasonable qualification.) The remaining 35 responses of a total of 46 said that they would recommend majoring in History at the University of West Georgia. These results represent a ringing endorsement by our alumni.

Respondents also strongly agreed that they had acquired useful skills in their history education at UWG. They most commonly cited the faculty as the department's greatest strength.

Section VI: Recommendations

Overall, the assessment instruments administered during 2011 show significant student progress in understanding the mechanics of the historical process, how to read texts, how to pose historical questions, how to do research in primary and secondary sources, and how to construct an historical argument that is then substantiated by reference to and analysis of concrete evidence. There is progress in student understanding of the meaning and significance of historiography. The quality of student writing has improved, though not equally among all students. There have been outstanding seminar papers written this past year, but the vast majority have either been either adequate or less than adequate. There continue to be too many students who demonstrate poor mastery and execution of basic writing and analytical skills. They write with poor grammar and syntax. I think that students are benefitting from increased emphasis upon writing in methodology and upper-level courses, but we need to do more to have them engaging with historiography before they come to senior seminar, and getting more practice with the analysis of primary source materials.

1. The department should strive to have students writing research papers in each upper-level course and written assignments that involve contextualizing topics in historiography and significant primary source analysis. Students also need more practice in analyzing primary sources and using these as part of their substantiation for an argument. It may be useful to work in upper-level classes on smaller document analysis papers that help students work toward a final research paper.
2. Dr. Hébert recommends that the department consider creating an overlay across all of our upper division and perhaps even honors section courses that would incorporate some historiographical instruction universally.
3. It would also be helpful to build into upper-level courses guidance in using library resources to locate primary and secondary sources. Dr. Elaine MacKinnon recommends that the department should seek to work more closely in all of the courses with library staff who can design library aides for particular topics and who can help students navigate the library databases and materials.
4. We should work to improve students' research skills. We should continue to encourage students to take Methodology before taking upper-level courses. The Methodology course should continue to emphasize heavily the building of research skills and the writing of papers.
5. We should continue with and even expand the historiography-based seminar. The historiography course should emphasize that certain works are more influential than others and that students need to learn to identify the most important works in a field.
6. As past assessment reports have stated, student writing still needs work, and we just have to keep requiring students to write both formal and informal assignments.
7. Continue to include model oral presentations in senior seminar. This is valuable practice for our students regardless of whether they are going to become teachers or move on into graduate programs or enter other parts of the workforce.
8. Establish a new Junior Historiography course that will help students improve their ability to analyze historiographical debate and conceive a strong Senior Seminar project.