Expected Outcomes: Historical Knowledge

Graduates will be familiar with a wide body of historical information and compare favorably with history majors nationally in historical knowledge.

Related typical general education outcomes:

9 Informed and Engaged Citizenship
10 Intercultural Knowledge and Diversity Awareness

Assessment methods

Method: Senior Thesis Textual Evaluation

HIST 4950 Senior Thesis is the capstone course required of all majors; the major task of this course is to research and write a significant historical paper utilizing primary sources. These projects have been scored on a standard rubric for over a decade. While we continue to utilize this same rubric, we have piloted a new rubric this cycle in an effort to increase the reliability of the instrument. We will continue to utilize both instruments in the coming cycle as well to provide a basis for comparison over years.

Findings:

The rubric we use is not set up to explicitly measure historical knowledge. But it is possible to infer from the categories of the rubric that students are not doing as well as we would like at recognizing and ordering the basic facts of their historical narratives.

How did you use findings for improvement?

In the draft report for 2010-2011 academic year, we indicated that we would seek a replacement method, for the test we used for this no longer exists. We plan to assess historical knowledge by adding questions onto the assessment of senior thesis that particularly ask about appropriate research methods for the topic and how students marshal appropriate historical knowledge in support of an argument. We believe instructors are in the best position to conduct this portion of the assessment.

Additional comments:

None

Expected Outcomes: Historical Research

Graduates will demonstrate basic skills in historical research, analysis of primary and secondary historical sources, and clear and concise writing.

Related typical general education outcomes:

1 Information Literacy
4 Ability to Construct Arguments
Assessment methods

Method: Senior Thesis Textual Evaluation

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Findings:

Students completing the senior thesis course in Spring 2011 did, on the whole, better than students completing the course in Spring 2009 on nearly all measures of the rubric. But the results (utilizing the same rubric as in previous years) in writing style (-3%), Analysis and Interpretation (+1%), and Overall Impression (+5%) were small enough to not be significant. But the improvements in Research (+11%) and Originality of Idea (+16%) seemed more significant and promising. The findings from the new rubric do not have earlier years for reference. A simple comparison suggests that faculty evaluators scored students on average higher using the new rubric, but the method was not tested for consistency or reliability. Still, informally, faculty evaluators reported that the new rubric was clearer and they felt it made them more consistent in their ratings of students.

How did you use findings for improvement?

The topic of student performance in the major, and especially the Senior Thesis project, proved a major component of the department’s self study during AY 2010-11. The department undergraduate committee has been tasked from that process to implement a number of changes to the undergraduate curriculum aimed at improving student learning. These include a set of clearer guidelines for HIST 3800, the methodology course that is a prerequisite for HIST 4950. They are also proposing means by which students can be required to take 3800 earlier in their curriculum. In fact, to ensure the development of the skills of critical thinking and analysis using primary sources, we now require history majors to take HIST 3800 within one year of completing their core history requirement. In most circumstances, this means their sophomore year of study. Another result of previous years of assessment meetings has been a determination by many individual faculty to increase their intentionality in naming the

Additional comments:

None

Expected Outcomes: Oral Communication

Graduates will be competent in oral communication of historical ideas and research.

Related typical general education outcomes:

- Oral Communication

Assessment methods

Method: Oral Presentation Assessment

We assess this in spring of even years with a review of oral presentations of senior thesis projects.
All baccalaureate students will make an oral presentation concerning their senior thesis project in HIST 4950. A jury of history faculty will judge the oral presentation according to a standard rubric.

Findings:

We assessed oral presentation in Spring 2012, using the same categories we did in Spring 2010. These categories include organization, preparation and topic knowledge, clarity of speech, ability to handle questions, use of A/V and IT, and overall impression. The results for 2012 were more positive, showing gains in virtually all categories: Students seemed better prepared, better organized, and more knowledgeable about their topic. Between Spring 2010 and Spring 2012, while the score (on a 5-point scale) for the ability to hand questions and the use of A/V and IT remained the same (3.8 and 3.9, respectively), the score went from 3.5 to 3.7 for organization, from 3.6 to 3.8 for preparation and topic knowledge, from 3.5 to 3.8 for clarity of speech, and from 3.5 to 3.7 in overall impression. Still, we need to be cautious about the degree of improvement. Score gains may be inflated by increased number of N/A ratings as well as the small number of ratings from which to draw from.

How did you use findings for improvement?

These results were an important part of the APR discussion; that along with previous assessment discussions have led to greater emphasis in courses before 4950 (HIST 3800 especially) on introducing and reinforcing oral presentation skills. Instructors in HIST 3800 now routinely require at least one oral presentation by students. Still, we need to encourage faculty to create more opportunities for students to improve oral communication skills.

Additional comments:

None