

**General Education Assessment  
Core Curriculum Assessment Report  
Social Sciences  
Department of History  
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June 30, 2017**

**Assessment of Core/Gen Ed classes**

In 2016 the Department of History carried out an assessment of its General Education courses to better understand how departmental and university learning goals are being fulfilled. The results of that assessment yielded much useful data, as can be seen, but the assessment itself can be better conducted in accordance with standard practices. Professor Muntz took part in a Gen Ed assessment trial conducted by David Joliffe in spring 2017. Based on these experiences, we can make the following recommendations for developing an ongoing assessment program of History's core classes.

Assessment and grading are two different, albeit similar, activities. The current best practice calls for assessment to be done independently of grading, in order to gain a more objective perspective. In History's 2016 trial, the assessment was done by the instructors themselves, with some examination by faculty members of the Curriculum Committee. In the future, History should consider employing graduate students who can be trained to assess papers independently of the class instructor. Perhaps History can seek funding from Fulbright to help support this effort. Blackboard offers tools that can simplify the assessment process.

Rubrics are a key element of assessment, and so it is important that they reflect the department's larger goals for the survey courses, but are also flexible enough to accommodate the broad range of topics and approaches that can be used, especially in survey classes as far-ranging as World Civilizations I & II. Rather than employing a "one size fits all" rubric, perhaps more suited to an upper-level research paper, as in the 2016 trial, it would make sense for faculty with experience teaching these classes to collaborate to explicate specific learning goals and an appropriate rubric for each class, which could be provided to instructors well in advance. Alternatively, since there are limitations to what a 5-page paper (the usual length in a survey course) can encompass, a rubric with more categories can be used, but instructors could be made aware that they only need to employ assignments that address a certain number of them. All rubrics should use a similar scale - in 2016 History's rubric employed a five-point scale, but instructors did not follow this consistently, making comparisons difficult. Four-point scales can simplify the process of assessment.

Care should be taken when using the data as well. The sample from a single year may not be representative, and so data should be collected every year, both to track progress and also to identify outliers. As data are accumulated, History can identify weaknesses, and also set expectations and goals. Since students in Gen Ed classes will probably not have the same level of dedication as History majors, expectations and goals should be kept reasonable. Above all it is important to avoid adopting the posture that all our students need to be "above average" or to

lose sight of the fact that the history survey courses are only one part in a student's academic development.

History also needs to make sure that the information obtained from assessment is used in a meaningful way. This will require closer faculty supervision of graduate students teaching the survey courses to help ensure that their approach and assignments fit our expectations and address the issues that our assessment helps raise. Above all, they should be made to feel that they are part of this process, and that it is about improving pedagogy and student outcomes.

### **Assessment of Senior Capstone Courses**

Students in the core classes come from all majors in all colleges at the university, and so assessment of these courses provides little information about History majors. The diversity of approaches and expectations for 3000/4000 level HIST courses make it difficult to use them for assessment, with the exception of the Senior Capstone. Since this course has a fixed requirement to produce a research paper to fulfill the Fulbright College writing requirement, developing a more specific rubric for assessment is viable. The rubric History employed in its 2016 assessment trial might even be more suitable for a capstone paper than for a survey paper. And since the capstone courses are very small, it should be possible to assess most or all of the papers in a given semester. Dr. Wayne carried out a trial run in her capstone class this past year.

It is recommended that History begin assessment of capstone classes on a larger scale, using faculty or perhaps again employing advanced graduate students. This can be used to supplement the information already gained through the exit surveys students fill out.

The assessment technique Wayne used in her Capstone Course, "The African American Freedom Struggle in Fiction and Film," in the Spring 2017 semester was similar to that used in the core courses the previous year. While the core courses have very different purposes and expectations from the capstone course, she found the use of the rubrics developed for assessment of the core to be easily adaptable. The core courses in U.S. history provide an introduction to the history of the United States and familiarizes them with primary documents and secondary sources. While not a writing intensive experience, the core courses require students to begin to develop their analytical and writing skills in their assessment of historical documents and secondary sources. The capstone course is designed for seniors and requires them to use the historical knowledge they have gained over the course of their undergraduate experience to more fully demonstrate skills of analysis, synthesis, and integration. They are required to produce a lengthy primary source-based research paper which properly contextualizes the subject matter and deals effectively with differing points of view as expressed in the appropriate historiography.

Wayne's capstone courses engaged students in probing the African American Freedom struggle through historical analysis of fiction and films. To do so effectively, students were required to read important secondary works of history and critical analysis (by historians) of films and fiction, and to demonstrate a mastery of the combined materials through short writing assignments. Ultimately, they were to research and write an analytical paper on a subtopic of their own selection on the African American freedom struggle.

Whayne used two assignments for the assessment experiment. The first assignment came in the second week of classes after the students had engaged in a short assignment focusing on a film, primary source material, and secondary sources. She slightly altered the rubric used for the 2016 assessment of the core courses to make it appropriate to the task at hand. The assignment read as follows:

Drawing from the play, *All the Way*, Harvard Sitkoff's *King: Pilgrimage to the Mountaintop*, and Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream Speech," write a five-paragraph essay. Begin your essay with an introductory paragraph that sets forth your argument. At least three paragraphs should follow which provide evidence from the play, the book, and the speech in making your argument. Be sure to cite in Chicago Manual of Style your sources:

Robert Schenkkan, *All the Way* (New York: Grove Press, 2014), pp. \_\_\_.

Harvard Sitkoff, *King: Pilgrimage to the Mountaintop* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), pp. \_\_\_.

To cite the text of the speech: Martin Luther King Jr., "I Have a Dream," BBC News, August 21, 2003, accessed January 30, 2017, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3170387.stm>

The second assessment in Whayne's capstone seminar occurred at the end of the course and assessed their performance in the writing of the major research paper. They were to select a topic, engage in further readings of secondary and primary sources, and write an analytical paper that properly contextualized the subject. Over the course of the semester, they wrote three short research reports focusing on (1) their subtopic and argument; (2) their primary source material; and (3) their secondary sources. In the three weeks leading up to the submission of their final papers, they provided Whayne with drafts of their papers and had meetings with her at least twice where they reviewed what they had written. The students selected a range of subtopics from "The Union League and SNCC: A Century Long Battle for Voting Rights," to "Music as Movement: The Tangible Effects of Music in the Struggle for African American Civil Rights." Students also wrote biographical studies such as "Bayard Rustin: The Lone Wolf of the Civil Rights Movement," and "Martin Luther King Jr. and Stokely Carmichael: Contrasting Brilliance." Each paper required its own set of secondary readings and primary research sources and students consulted closely with Whayne in selecting their topics and in identifying sources. The rubric used for assessing their performance on the research paper was necessarily more demanding than the one used for the short assignment. Although the rubrics used to measure their performance on the two assignments were slightly different, they each addressed the six major learning objectives:

- (SSLO1) Engage in historical inquiry, contextualizing past events with precision and detail
- (SSLO2) Distinguish between primary and secondary materials and decide when to use each

- (SSLO3) Critically evaluate historical sources, and recognize their value, by exploring conflicting narratives, points of view, and evidence
- (SSLO4) Develop and defend an argument backed by evidence that engages research material with a clear introduction, supporting evidence, and a conclusion that addresses broad implications
- (SSLO5) Demonstrate knowledge of historical research techniques, documentation, organization
- (SSLO6) Master the mechanics of academic writing, communicating with logic and style

The first assignment essentially assessed the abilities they brought into the class and confirmed that our senior history majors have more than satisfied our expectations. Wayne employed a ten point scale for each of the six learning objectives. Their overall performance on that first assignment was as follows:

#### FIRST ASSIGNMENT

Student

ID	SSL01	SSL02	SSL03	SSL04	SSL05	SSL06	Total	Grade
1	8.9	10	8.2	8.5	8.4	8.2	52.2	B
2	9.4	10	9.6	9	9.4	9	56.4	A
3	9	10	9	9	9	8	54	B
4	8.8	10	8.9	8.5	8	8	52.2	B
5	8.2	10	8.1	8.5	8.2	8	51	B
6	8.5	10	8.8	8.8	9	8.3	53.4	B+
7	8.4	10	8	8	8	8	50.4	B
8	8.5	10	8	8.1	8.2	8.2	51	B
9	9	10	9.3	9.3	9.2	9	55.8	A
10	8.8	10	8.9	8.4	8.1	8	52.2	B
11	9	10	9.8	9.5	9.4	9.3	57	A-
12	9.5	10	9.5	9.5	9.5	9	57	A-
13	9.1	10	9	9.1	9	9	55.2	A-
14	8.5	10	8.6	8.8	8.8	8.7	53.4	B+

Over the course of the semester, students engaged in intensive analysis of films, fiction, historical texts, and primary sources in preparation for researching and writing their final papers. Much of the work reviewed during the semester was directly pertinent to the papers they wrote although all of them had to engage in additional reading and research. Although the research paper was a much more intensive writing assignment, they were well prepared to engage in the project. Only one student failed to perform adequately and that was apparently owing to a common malady that affects some graduating seniors: senioritis. She missed two of her final three appointments and only turned in one of the two required drafts of the paper. Otherwise,

students took the assignment quite seriously, met with Wayne at the appointed times, and produced quality papers. Most of them became thoroughly engaged with their research topic, and most of them improved their learning objective scores even though the research paper was far more demanding:

RESEARCH PAPER:

Student ID	Res. paper	SSL01	SSL02	SSL03	SSL04	SSL05	SSL06			
1	1	9.5	9.5	9.7	9.7	9.6	9	57	A	
2	2	9.5	9.5	9.4	9.5	9.5	9	56.4	A	
3	3	8.8	8.8	8.5	9.1	9	8	52.2	B	
4	4	9	9.5	9.2	9	9.5	9	55.2	A	
5	5	9.5	9	9.5	9.3	9.5	9	55.8	A	
6	6	9.5	9.5	9.5	9.4	9.5	9	56.4	A	
7	7	9.2	9	9.5	9.5	9	9	55.2	A	
8	8	9	9	9.5	9.5	9.2	9	55.2	A	
9	9	9	9.3	9.5	9.5	9.5	9	55.8	A	
10	10	9.4	9	9.4	9.5	9.5	9	55.8	A	
11	11	8.8	9	8.8	8.8	8.2	8	51.6	B	
12	12	9.5	9.6	9.4	9.5	9.5	9.5	57	A	
13	13	9.5	9.5	9.5	9.7	9.3	9.5	57	A	
14	14	5.5	7	6.8	6.8	6.8	6.1	39	D	

In only one respect was there a sharp difference between the first assignment and the final research paper: SSLO2 “Distinguish between primary and secondary materials and decide when to use each.” This was entirely understandable given that Wayne had identified the three sources they were to use for the first assignment and reviewed them carefully with them. In an in-class assignment prior to writing the assessed assignment, they had written dramaturgies on the film, engaged in close discussion of the film, drew from Harvard Sitkoff’s book in that discussion, and watched the “I Have a Dream Speech” as well as read a text copy of the speech. In other words, they fully understood the differences between the sources and were thoroughly familiar with them. Because they were writing their research papers on very different topics, it was not possible to replicate the experience with the first assignment. Still, they performed quite well in that category.

The experiment using the rubrics designed for the core courses with the capstone course for seniors is a good example of how this assessment tool can be employed to assess student grades.