

Academic Assessment Report
Department of History
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At the end of the Fall semester 2015 and Spring 2016 semester, instructors administered exit surveys to graduating seniors enrolled in three sections of the HIST 4893 Senior Capstone. The document in this appendix is the template questionnaire given to instructors.

As in the past Spring 2015, survey questions were designed to assess the undergraduate program's learning outcomes as stated in the 2015 Academic Assessment Plan. This year, the UGS Director also asked the two Capstone instructors of faculty ranking to provide their own evaluation of the feedback received from students throughout the duration of the seminars. This year's assessment in part benefits from the use of results and methods adopted in the current academic year, based on last year's evaluation of the Spring 2015 surveys. It also recommends further implementation of methods to meet our retention and graduation goals, which fulfill our institution's mission of increasing graduation rates, as stated by the Quality Initiative Proposal of 2014.

The Senior Capstone varies in research topical focus from section to section, but each course shares the following activities and promotion of skill sets: the development of a testable research question or thesis, analysis of primary sources, effective written and oral communication, production of a lengthy primary research-based paper.

History majors, by the end of their curriculum, will demonstrate proficiency with critical thinking and writing skills, and with historical research methods designed to support well-argued answers to historical questions utilizing primary and secondary sources

Stated learning outcomes for the B.A. in History (2015 Academic Assessment Plan-History):

- Develop knowledge and skills necessary for careers requiring knowledge of history, critical analysis, and research, including teaching, law, and government
- Allow students to pursue their interest in a particular region, time, period, or culture
- Enhance understanding of the role played by diversity in the shaping of human experience
- Train students to communicate effectively in writing
- Train students to communicate effectively in class discussion
- Ensure that students understand the basic mechanics of historical research, including location and retrieval of information, correct usage of primary and secondary materials, and proper citation techniques
- Provide future generations of historians with the training necessary to allow them to continue the pursuit of the above goals

Capstone seminars general techniques for B.A. in History (2015 Academic Assessment Plan – History)

- Senior capstone seminar required for all History majors (HIST 4893)
- The Capstone seminar requires majors to conduct original archival research and produce article-length essays (the best of which are published in the *Ozark Historical Review* or occasionally in the *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*)
- Capstone seminars also introduce majors to the philosophy and methodology of the discipline
- Seniors enrolled in the capstone sections have already taken writing-intensive upper-level courses in their fields of specialization
- In some cases, seniors in capstone have also had previous enrollment in discussion-oriented seminars designed to enhance communication skills

Exit Surveys Results

Most of the 82 graduating seniors enrolled in the six capstone sections (three in the Fall of 2015 and three in the Spring of 2016) completed the exit surveys. As in the survey of 2015, this one had only one question with a numerical rating: “On a scale of 1 to 10, how prepared did you feel for the work you did in the capstone based on your previous HIST coursework and why?” This year the average rating was **7.95**, only slightly lower than last year’s of **8.15**. This result confirms that most students benefitted from their previous coursework in HIST classes, and considered the capstone’s large research project as the culmination of an excellent training program.

This year the capstone instructors, under recommendation of the UGS Committee, asked students to provide extensive responses, particularly on the questions that addressed their prior training in History courses (e.g.: “What could the History department do over the course of your academic career to help you prepare better for the capstone?”) or the questions about the connection between their History degree and their career plans.

Based on the responses, the high scores of the rated question should be qualified. These were common patterns in the responses:

- Limited experience in working with and analyzing primary sources
- Limited training in mechanics of paper writing, such as citing in Chicago style
- Need for specialized advising (from the History department) mapping a coherent, progressive sequence of courses
- Lack of experience on oral presentations and communication
- Need for flexibility on research area (social, political, diplomatic, etc.) within each capstone
- Burdensome foreign language requirement for History majors
- A limited understanding of career options outside the teaching profession

Issues most specifically addressed in exit surveys

Reporting students particularly expressed the need to have more training for long research papers in our upper level classes, with the possibility of tutoring through at least two paper drafts. Some went further, recommending a specific course, early in their student career, teaching the fundamentals of research skills and techniques.

As each capstone concentrated on the area of expertise of the respective instructors, some students felt that, due to scheduling, they had to choose the section that did not best fit their geographic, chronological, or especially topical preference. The same was reported by the two faculty instructors, who highlighted the need to tailor their specialty fields to the training of each student. One of the instructors expressed the intention of focusing his next capstone seminar on a broader theme that would leave room for multiple angles of analysis, from social to cultural and political aspects. Both faculty members understood that students need more pre-training with our library sources, especially the archival material in Special Collections.

Survey returns also show that students with a preference for courses and themes in US History have displayed a consistent opposition to the four semester sequence of our foreign language requirement, while students focusing on other world areas prefer to retain the requirement, with a few even citing their study abroad sessions as one of their most important learning experiences. In a few instances, the foreign language requirement may constitute a serious obstacle toward completion of the degree, and should therefore be addressed in our retention plans.

There has not been a particular distinction, in the students' opinion, between the quality of the capstones taught by our tenured or tenure-track faculty and those taught by our ABD instructors. This is further evidence that the History Department has continued to attract high performing graduate students, and has done an excellent job in further training them in the early stages of their profession.

More than half of the polled students reported that they will most likely pursue a teaching career, at the high school or college levels. Law School was a distant second in their professional/school career options. Only a handful expressed an interest in professions, in the public or private sectors, which offer opportunities for the analytical, research skills and thematic knowledge acquired with a History degree.

Use of Results

History coursework from the 1000-4000 levels generally has prepared students to undertake a major research project and paper in the Senior Capstone. However, based on the survey results -- mostly the narrative responses and the reports from the two faculty members assigned to capstone -- the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee and the Director of Undergraduate Studies in consultation with the Chair and Associate Chair will explore the following measures and curricular changes (some of the following are already being implemented, and are marked by a * on the list):

- * Introduction from Fall of 2016 of a topical History Perspective course, taught by faculty, granting 3 credit hours and meeting both a major elective requirement and the perspectives requirement. This course will introduce students to the basic research and analytical skills of the historian's craft.
- * Improving the mentoring of our graduate instructors with the introduction, starting from Fall 2016, of four large sections (one each) of our core curriculum survey classes taught by faculty with prior teaching awards and staffed with two or three graduate assistants per sections.
- * The current curriculum agreement between the History Department and the Fulbright Advising office provides more flexibility than in the past for course substitutions at the discretion of the UGSD that will enable students to receive appropriate credit transfers from accredited institutions or study abroad programs.
- Encourage more faculty members to teach the capstone, turning the current 4-2 ratio of instructors/faculty for the two semesters into a 3-3 ratio.
- Teaching basic research skills, proficiency with critical thinking and writing skills, including citation styles in survey level courses outside the Perspectives class.
- In coordination with the Fulbright Advising Office, assist students with course sequencing that allows the gradual acquisition of research skills, geographic or chronological area expertise.
- Requiring of each of our 3000 and 4000-level courses to include a primary research assignment and/or a historiographical essay based on secondary sources.
- Incorporate more oral presentation assignments in HIST courses.
- Providing students who elect to take at least five courses in US History out of the eight upper level course sequence the option of reducing the foreign language requirement to a two semester sequence covering the beginner level.
- At the same time, through advising, encourage students to benefit from learning a foreign language at the intermediate level.
- To provide career mentoring and conveying the applicability of the training, concepts, and skills gained from a history major to careers outside of teaching and archival or museum, the Department will encourage high impact practices through internships and improve the existing network of History alumni connected to the Department through Linked-In, which helps us track students' success records after graduation.
- Promotion of Career planning sessions, including resumé development, participation in Humanities@work initiatives, mock interviews, etc., in coordination with the University Career Center and Fulbright Director of Employer Relations.

Conclusion

Survey results show that students have adequate training throughout their History coursework, especially at their upper level. The department is taking steps to further improve course offerings and the research components in them. It is also set to provide better advising, as well as career mentoring, communicating the applicability of the skills and concepts gained from a history major to careers outside of teaching and archival or museum work.

University of Arkansas History Department
Graduation Survey (Undergraduates)
[to be administered in required capstone course, HIST 4893]

Name _____

Expected graduation date _____

Questions on your experience as a major in History:

1. What surprised you the most about what skills you needed in order to complete the capstone?

2. On a scale of 1 to 10, how prepared did you feel for the work you did in the capstone based on your previous HIST coursework AND why?

3. What courses in History/types of skills learned in those courses helped you the most in the capstone?

4. What could the History department do to help you over the course of your academic career to help prepare you for the capstone better?

5. What suggestions would you make for the future of the History degree program?

6. Other comments on strengths and weaknesses of the History degree program.

7. Do you feel like the history major has prepared you for your intended career? Why or why not?

8. What are your short-term plans (next 2 years)?

9. What are your longer-term plans?

10. Contact address/e-mail after graduation