

**History Department  
Assessment Plan for BA in History and Social Studies**

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**Introduction/Context**

The department administers two BA programs: one in History and one in Social Studies. We currently have 126 History majors and 90 Social Studies majors. Approximately 48 Social Studies majors are double majors in History. The primary difference between the two programs is that the BA in Social Studies, taken along with a Minor in Secondary Education, prepares students for state licensure. Since Social Studies majors take at least 40 credit hours of History (History majors take a minimum of 32 credit hours in History), the assessment of the two programs (as approved in previous assessment reports) is administered jointly.

Since its 2002 assessment report, the History Department faculty has been engaged in an ongoing discussion of the goals for our BA programs in History and Social Studies. These discussions have been informed by (1) the feedback received on the 2002, 2004, 2005 assessment reports and (2) discussions about whether ours is a skills-based or content-based BA program. Because our History major requires only geographical and chronological distribution of courses, it is conceivable that two majors could pursue completely different programs of study; in other words, they might not take the same courses. This makes the use of content-based goals and outcomes of the program untenable. Thus, the faculty has discussed since 2002 the creation of skill-based goals (goals #2 and #3 below) which we have assessed in 2004, 2005 and 2006. Social Studies majors do take some of the same core courses; we are pursuing the possibility of using the Praxis II exam as a content-based measure of their experience in the program (see below in New Assessment Initiatives). The third goal (#1 below) is value-based, probing the extent to which students have valued the study of History and/or Social Studies. In 2004, 2005, and 2006 we collected data relevant to this goal as well. The results and procedure follow.

**New Assessment Initiative**

We began in 2004 a more systematic collection of the results from the PRAXIS II exam that all of our Social Studies majors take in order to fulfill licensure requirements. The Social Studies majors are a subset of our overall BA program (approximately ½ of our majors), but they take many of the same courses that our History BA students take. Thus, the PRAXIS II results would certainly tell us about our Social Studies majors, but would also indirectly provide information about our History majors. We have begun compiling this data and will develop an assessment goal tied to these results in 2006-07.

## Program Goals

**Goal #1:** Students will appreciate the value of studying history. This goal was developed in 2002 by the faculty of the History Department. In 2004, 2005, and 2006 we reviewed this goal. The findings each year suggest that it is still working as an appropriate goal for the program.

**Outcome measures:** We look for statements that reflect conclusions like the following: applying the lessons of the past to today's problems; using the study of history to further a career goal; gaining a greater appreciation of the process of change over time. These outcome measures were developed by the faculty in 2002 and there has been no need to modify them.

**Research methods:** Indirect and ongoing. Exit essays asking students to respond to the following questions are systematically collected from all graduating majors as part of their graduation application and exit interview. Approximately 95% of the students turn these in. Questions: What do you see to be the value of having studied history? How has an understanding of history contributed to your understanding of the human experience and your place in it?

**Findings:** As in previous years' review of these responses, in 2006 students responded very directly and specifically to these questions. Their answers were in no way "pat" or generic. They overwhelmingly highlighted the utility of history for understanding today's problems. Some indicated the ways in which (research skills, critical thinking) history will further their career goals. Others emphasized that history has provided a greater understanding of cultural diversity.

**Review:** In 2004-6 graduating seniors wrote the essay as part of the exit interview and discussed it with the Director of Undergraduate Studies in the exit interview; in spring 2005 the Director of Undergraduate Studies reviewed all of the responses collectively and reported the results to the History Department. *In 2006 we implemented an action identified in the 2005 assessment report of having the Undergraduate Advisory Committee read these essays. This committee then discussed another action item identified in the 2005 assessment report: the revision of these essay questions.*

**Actions:** Will continue annual review of these materials; **in spring 2006 the Undergraduate Advisory Committee proposed a new essay question that would be a better means of assessing Goal #1. When the Director of Undergraduate Studies reports on the 2006 assessment report at a fall 2006 meeting of the Department, she will seek to have this new essay question approved by the department.**

**Goal #2:** Students will demonstrate analytical thinking skills in their written work. This goal was developed in 2004 by the faculty of the History Department. In 2006 we reviewed this goal. It is still working as an appropriate goal for the program.

**Outcome measures:** Analytical thinking skills are demonstrated by things like the following: ability to identify a historical question and provide cogent answers; ability to do more than simply narrate historical events but instead to demonstrate their historical meaning and contextual significance; ability to perform synthetic analysis of several sources. These outcome measures were developed by the faculty in 2004 and there has been no need to modify them.

**Research:** Direct and ongoing. When students declare a major in History or Social Studies they submit a writing sample during their entrance interview—these writing samples in turn become are "baseline" sample of student writing skills; a later writing sample of what the students considers his/her best work is collected from all graduating majors as part of their graduation application and exit interview; approximately 95% of the students turn these in. A committee of three faculty (currently the Undergraduate Studies Advisory Committee) first reads a random sample (10-12) of baseline essays collected in the entrance interview. The committee then reviews a random sample (10-12 papers = approximately ¼ of graduating seniors) using a standard rubric. Director of Undergraduate Studies meets with review committee first and then reports overall findings at department meeting the following fall.

**Findings:** In 2006 the three faculty members reported that all of the exit interview samples demonstrated "Excellent" or "Good" or "Fair" analytical thinking skills (none were scored as "Poor"). One faculty member found that 30% scored "Excellent" or "Good", another that 40% did, and the third that 100% did. The committee felt, however, that the variety of assignments submitted by students (some, but not all, are research papers) makes it difficult to do a systematic review. **This has led to a specific action item below.**

**Review:** Continue with annual review of these materials; Director of Undergraduate Studies meets with review committee first and then reports overall findings at department meeting in the fall.

**Actions:** Will continue annual review of these materials; will continue to rotate the membership of the committee that reads these essays; **the department is currently reviewing a proposal from the department Curriculum Committee to revise the History major to include a capstone research seminar. If approved this course would allow us to pursue an action identified in the 2005 report of assessing more specific analytical skills (e.g. synthesizing several sources, analyzing primary sources).**

**Goal #3:** Students will demonstrate effective written communication skills. In 2006 we reviewed this goal. It is still working as an appropriate goal for the program.

**Outcome measures:** Effective written communication includes the following demonstrable skills: clear thesis statement; cogent organization of material; effective transitions between sections; persuasive argument in support of thesis; use of specific evidence and examples.

**Research:** Direct and ongoing. When students declare a major in History or Social Studies they submit a writing sample during their entrance interview—these writing samples in turn become are "baseline" sample of student writing skills; a later writing sample of what the students considers his/her best work is collected from all graduating majors as part of their graduation application and exit interview; approximately 95% of the students turn these in. A committee of three faculty (currently the Undergraduate Studies Advisory Committee) first reads a random sample (10-12) of baseline essays collected in the entrance interview. The committee then reviews a random sample (10-12 papers = approximately ¼ of graduating seniors) using a standard rubric. Director of Undergraduate Studies meets with review committee first and then reports overall findings at department meeting the following Fall.

**Findings:** In 2006 the three faculty members were in agreement that at least 70% of the exit interview samples demonstrated either "Excellent" or "Good" written communication skills.

**Review:** Continue with annual review of these materials; Director of Undergraduate Studies meets with review committee first and then reports overall findings at department meeting in spring.

**Actions:** Will continue annual review of these materials; will continue to rotate the membership of the committee that reads these essays.