

**History Department  
Assessment Plan for MA in History**

**May 31, 2007**

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**Introduction/Context**

The department administers one MA program and participates in a joint MA program with the art history portion of the Art Department which administers that program. We currently have 47 students and another fifteen in the art history portion. In addition to our regular tract we have an MA in history with a specialization in social studies which attracts very few students and, consequently, will not be separately assessed. The master's program requires 32 credits three 500 level cross-listed courses and five 600 level courses. This is a change made two years ago when the mix was split evenly between 500 and 600 level courses. Our assessment of the change which was implemented in Fall, 2005 is that it has been very successful. Over the past twelve months the Graduate Committee of the History Department evaluated the program. These discussions used the assessment reports from the past three years as well as other relevant information to improve our program.

**New Program Initiatives**

We began in AY 2006-2007 with several initiatives. First, following reviews of our students' papers for the 2004 assessment we implemented a new master's curriculum in Fall, 2005 which increased the number of 600 level courses from four to five. The new emphasis increased student knowledge and contact with historiographical perspectives. Our conclusions buttressed by student evaluations are that the changes have enhanced the program. Second, the Graduate Committee examined the requirements for our cross-listed 500 level courses and concluded with a series of changes. Anecdotal evidence confirms that these new requirements were implemented and a more formal process will be designed to confirm it for next year. Third, the new assessment criteria for Goal 3 revealed an increased emphasis on historiography. Assessment of Goal #3 indicates the change was successful. Fourth, more than a year ago the department began asking its students what they gained from their masters' experience. By Spring, 2007 we have collected a sufficient number of responses to assess student satisfaction and suggestions for improvement. The preponderance of positive comments which highlighted the quality of the courses and the accessibility of the faculty teaching those courses mean there are no obvious changes to be made - we will continue to require exit responses and continue to evaluate them. (See a synopsis at the end to this report) The one general criticism of the program is that a greater variety of courses and an increased number of courses should be offered at the 600 level. All students are warned of this limitation when they enter the program and the size of the History faculty is responsible for the restricted offerings. However, in response to these comments and to the increasing number of tenured faculty, we will offer, for the first time, two 600 level readings courses and our graduate research seminar in Spring, 2008.

## Program Goals

**Goal #1:** An ability to identify relevant primary and secondary sources to be used in a historical research project. This goal was developed in 2004 by the faculty of the History Department. In 2004 and 2005 we reviewed this goal. The findings of the first year suggest that it is appropriate but we will confirm that conclusion when the review of the 2006 is complete. .

**Outcome measures:** We analyze the variety and the viability of primary sources appropriate to the topic by using the citations and bibliographies submitted with the research papers. We also see if the relevant secondary materials, especially the most recent ones, were included. These 2004 outcome measures proved useful and there is no need to modify them.

**Research methods:** Since many students in H 695 took incompletes we include information on the 2006 papers here and will await a full contingent of papers before undertaking a thorough evaluation. Three members of the Graduate Faculty of the Department read and evaluated one-half of the papers submitted for H 695, for Spring, 2006. The papers were randomly selected and names removed. The evaluation asked each reviewer to apply a rubric of specific definitions and rate the essays excellent, adequate, or inadequate.

**Findings:** The 2007 review rated 5 papers excellent and 8 adequate with none inadequate. The reviewers agreed with our earlier evaluation and thought the papers could have a stronger sense of the historical background of the particular topic and a stronger historiographical presence.

**Review:** The Director of Graduate Studies will report the results to the History Department.

**Actions:** The Graduate Committee will continue to review these essays and by Fall, 2007 will ask the Department for suggestions which might improve the evaluations of these papers.

**Goal #2:** An ability to analyze/evaluate historical evidence in order to formulate a coherent argument. Each research paper submitted in H 695 will have a clear, analytical thesis which incorporates primary and secondary material and acknowledges alternative interpretations. It will be clearly written and well-organized. This goal was developed in 2004 by the faculty of the History Department.

**Outcome measures:** Using the same format our Departmental reviewers judge the structure, coherence and style of the essays. Using the same blind review process used for Goal #1, these outcome measures were developed by the faculty in 2004 and there has been no need to modify them.

**Research methods:** Three members of the Graduate Faculty of the Department read and evaluated one-half of the papers submitted for H 695, the research seminar. The papers were randomly selected and names removed. During Spring semester, 2007 after all incompletes were submitted and graded a comprehensive analysis was completed. The evaluation asked each reviewer to apply a rubric of specific definitions and rate the essays excellent, adequate, or inadequate.

**Findings:** In 2006 three faculty members reported 4 excellent papers, 6 adequate papers and 3 inadequate papers. The reviewers thought that papers needed more care in writing and that much of the structure while adequate was not compelling. Some papers suffered from too little research and careless writing. The 2007 analysis rated 7 excellent, 5 adequate and 1 inadequate.

**Review:** The Graduate Committee was pleased that more papers were rated as excellent. We will continue with annual review of these materials and the Director of Graduate Studies will report overall findings to the Department.

**Actions:** Between 2004 and 2007 three different faculty groups have read the H695 papers. The recommendation, as predicted in last year's review, is the need for increased emphasis on writing as students prepare these papers. The Spring, 2005 H 695 did implement this heightened emphasis and the evaluators did notice improvements in the writing of all papers deemed excellent or adequate. The increasingly better papers indicate that goal #2 has been met in most cases.

**Goal #3:** Was substantially improved by the Graduate Committee in Spring 2006. It now reads. An ability to analyze and articulate a thesis about a body of secondary literature on a particular topic in history, as well as an ability to identify the cumulative "dialogue" in this literature.

**Outcome measures:** We implemented the new rubric when H 601 is offered in Fall, 2006.

**Research:** Five members of the Graduate Committee read and evaluated all of the papers submitted for H 601 in the Spring, 2007. Each reviewer applied the earlier rubric of specific definitions and rated the essays excellent, adequate, or inadequate. The Director of Graduate Studies meets with the review committee first and then reports overall findings to the Department.

**Findings:** The 2004 analysis that 11 papers were adequate, 4 inadequate and none excellent. The 2005 analysis rated 8 excellent, 19 adequate and 3 inadequate (10 papers judged by 3 readers). The 2006 analysis rated 1 excellent 5 adequate and 3 inadequate. The 2007 results rated 5 excellent, 5 adequate and 1 inadequate. We are pleased to note the improvement in compliance with goal #3 and hope to continue our success in the future.

**Review:** Continue with annual review of these materials; Director of Graduate Studies meets with review committee first and then reports overall findings at a Department meeting.

**Actions:** Over the last four years three different faculty committees read the selected essays. We will continue to monitor the quality of these essays. After the review the Committee decided to alter the rubric as indicated above. As noted in findings we are pleased to note the improvement in compliance with goal #3 and hope to continue our success in the future.

As was stated in the New Program Initiatives Section, the Department made its masters program more rigorous by having students take one more 600 level course and one less 500 level course. We have evaluated its effectiveness in AY 2006-2007 and concluded that except for limited course selection students are satisfied with the content and rigor of 600 level courses.

### **New Criteria for Goal 3 used to judge for AY 2006-2007.**

**Excellent:** The paper articulates a clear thesis about the cumulative "dialogue" within the body of secondary historical literature and provides a comparative analysis of the sources. It demonstrates understanding of how approaches to a subject have developed over time. It can assess the strengths and weaknesses of the various approaches. The paper is written in a clear, well-organized, and compelling style.

**Adequate:** The paper demonstrates comprehension that different approaches to a subject are represented in the body of literature. It demonstrates understanding of how approaches to that subject have developed over time. It shows recognition that the literature represents a variety of

interpretive conclusions about that subject. There are minor problems of organization, style, and grammar.

Inadequate: The paper used the body of literature but does not demonstrate comprehension that the secondary sources may offer conflicting arguments. It treats the literature as a cumulative mass of factual data. The paper is hampered by an unclear writing style, poor organization, and numerous grammatical errors.

## **Exit Interview Results 10 respondents**

### **General questions about the program**

1. Asked to what degree have your expectations about the History Master's been fulfilled? In general, students found the "level of the classes has been challenging and thought provoking" and as one stated "Overall I am very pleased with the education I've received. I learned to compile, triage, analyze, and write coherently on large volumes of material. Most importantly for me, I've learned to think in broad themes while using specific examples to illustrate arguments." One student said expectations were not fulfilled because he/she had to take courses in which he/she had no interest. This comment is accurate but all students are informed of the limitations of course selection as they enter the program.

2. When asked how they thought the master's experience would affect their future career goals/objectives/expectations all responses were positive. Typical responses included: "as a tool that allows me to advance in my career, As a Master's degree will be required in order to advance in my field, the experience and tools I have gathered here at CSU will undoubtedly assist in that." It "will my enhance career I have learned in rapidly reading and analyzing books and documents as well as the ability to write a well written analytical critique or report is a skill that is transferable to any field." Students saw the degree "as providing a very sound foundation and stepping stone to achieve ... career goals" which will allow them to advance in their careers or , as one stated, since "my future goal is to be a high school social studies teacher. Classes addressing content rather than method are more effective for this goal."

### **Questions regarding program strengths and suggestions for improvement**

1. Students overwhelmingly felt they had become more competent and effective readers, better able to analyze complex textual material with facility. (All answered either to a large degree or very much so).
2. Students concluded they could better organize and communicate effectively using primary and secondary source materials. (Six answered to a large degree or 3 very much so and one to some degree).
3. Students were convinced that they could better understand and apply effective and efficient research strategies to well-considered and meaningful topic choices. (8 of 10 answered either to a large degree or very much so).
4. Fully eighty per cent felt they were more familiar with and could better apply effective evaluative, analytical and argumentative approaches in both oral and written communication as a result of the program.

5. Students thought the strengths of the program included the 600 level classes, the level of interaction between professor and students and student to student, professors who were passionate about their area of study, the intellectual rigor of the classes, and low cost.
6. Suggestions for improvement included more choice at the 600 level (a good suggestion constrained by budget and faculty availability and not easily solved). One asked for more emphasis on research skills and another suggested a distinguished graduate student award be given each semester.
7. Overall they thought their educational experiences in the program were very good. “The program certainly challenges students to hone their academic abilities and time-management skills.” And “for the most part they were outstanding – challenging yet realistic – Good book choices. Most thought the 600 level classes were well taught and that many courses (especially 695) helped improve writing skills. One found the cross-listed 500 level classes too easy.
8. Finally a few suggested ways to make the masters experience more student friendly by having more reading seminars and serving alcohol (wine) at social functions but most said the program was already student friendly.

Given the positive nature of the comments there are no obvious changes to be made - we will continue to require exit responses and continue to evaluate them.