

Annual Assessment Report

Academic Year: 2013-2014

Department: History & Philosophy

Program(s): History/History & History/Teaching

Assessment reports are to be submitted annually to report assessment activities and results by program. The reports are due every summer with a deadline of September 15th each year.

The use of this template is entirely optional.

Note: These reports have been required by MSU policy since 2004.

1. What Was Done

Based on our assessment plan, we evaluated program learning outcomes 2 through 5 this year.

2. be able to distinguish between primary and secondary sources
3. be able to marshal evidence from both primary and secondary sources to support an argument
4. be able to communicate effectively
5. be able to recognize that historical events are subject to multiple interpretations

Learning Outcome 2: be able to distinguish between primary and secondary sources

Excellent	19%
Good	24%
Acceptable	33%
Poor	24%

Total "Acceptable" and better: 76%. This result meets the goal of 75% of our majors being able to distinguish between primary and secondary sources.

Learning Outcome 3: be able to marshal evidence from both primary and secondary sources to support an argument

Excellent	14%
Good	38%
Acceptable	38%
Poor	10%

Total "Acceptable" and better: 90%. This result meets the goal of 75% of our majors being able to marshal evidence from both primary and secondary sources to support an argument.

Learning Outcome 4: be able to communicate effectively

Excellent	38%
Good	19%

Acceptable 38%

Poor 5%

Total “Acceptable” and better: 95%. This result meets the goal of 75% of our majors being able to communicate effectively, at least in written form.

Learning Outcome 5: be able to recognize that historical events are subject to multiple interpretations

Excellent 38%

Good 19%

Acceptable 38%

Poor 5%

Total “Acceptable” and better: 95%. This result meets the goal of 75% of our majors being able to recognize that historical events are subject to multiple interpretations.

2. What Data Were Collected

Kellie Stoolman, Student Services Coordinator, randomly chose 21 papers from the past two semesters’ (Fall 2013 & Spring 2014) HSTA 499 courses--the History major’s capstone course. A faculty committee of three read the papers and evaluated them according to the rubrics amended to the back of this report.

3. What Was Learned

Outcome 2. While students met the standard of “acceptable” with this outcome, the committee realized that the capstone papers are not the best documents to judge this criteria, as in very few cases do the papers require a specific discussion of the nature of sources.

Outcome 3: There was a very high level of use of multiple sources in the vast majority of the capstone papers, some used a modicum of primary sources, but virtually all used a combination of primary and secondary sources to support their arguments. In contrast to the papers we evaluated last year, this batch employed a much wider array of sources from the “deep web,” i.e., collections of archival sources and historical newspapers, as well as non-electronic sources. Since this was one of the issues we targeted last year, we are pleased to see improvement in the array of sources used by students.

Outcome 4: Each of us on the committee came to the evaluation meeting expressing delight at how well written these papers were—with a few exceptions, naturally. One group of papers, in particular, exhibited a polish the others did not, and we realized that section of the capstone was fortunate enough to have a teaching assistant assigned to it. This experiment demonstrated the benefit of such assistance, in that the papers were better organized, had clearer topic sentences and tighter arguments, and few grammatical errors, and were based on a wider menu of sources.

Outcome 5: Again, there was a very high level of success with this learning outcome, demonstrated with varying levels of sophistication. We feel that students are indeed graduating with an understanding of this key precept of the discipline of history.

4. How We Responded

Outcome 2: The committee suggests that we use some other instrument to evaluate Learning Outcome 2. Jan Zauha, the library's liaison to the department developed a survey monkey to assess students' familiarity with library resources that also has questions to measure their knowledge of what is a primary and secondary source. We could use that.

Outcome 3: We may wish to address the issue of students making some comments about historiography in their capstone papers. This would allow us to judge their understanding of the state of the subfield in which they are writing and would give them an opportunity to explicitly engage in a critical approach to the sources.

Outcome 4: While overall we were impressed with the quality of writing in the papers, we also agreed that virtually all of the papers needed some more explicit statements regarding the development of each author's argument and how it contributes to their overall thesis. That is a skill we need to work on with them. The department faculty has been discussing the possibility of using teaching assistants in other ways than in their traditional role as assistants to large 100 level courses. The quality of papers in the capstone class that had a graduate student attached to it is evidence that this may be a most effective way to truly improve the quality of history majors' work. It is certainly worth trying again.

Outcome 5: We feel that students are indeed graduating with an understanding of this key precept of the discipline of history, and that our classes are providing the instruction necessary for them to learn that the past has multiple interpretations.

Rubrics for evaluation

2. Distinguish between primary & secondary sources

Excellent: there is an explicit discussion of the nature of sources used in the paper

Good: there is an embedded understanding of the difference between types of sources

Acceptable: the paper demonstrated the use of primary and secondary sources but without notable distinction

Poor: the paper used only secondary sources with no sense that original research requires primary materials

3. Marshall evidence primary & secondary sources to support an argument:

Excellent: makes a clear connection between a claim and source material and uses more than one kind of material to support that claim, sometimes with a comment on the nature of the evidence

Good: makes a connection between a claim and source materials, but does not contextualize the source

Acceptable: makes a connection between a claim and a source, but uses limited sources, is overly dependent on a single source without explanation

Poor: makes a claim but doesn't have convincing evidence

4. Communicate effectively

Excellent: organizes essay with introduction, explanatory body and conclusion; has paragraphs with clear topic sentences, is grammatically correct and virtually error free, and shows evidence of a "voice" of their own and some stylistic flair

Good: organizes essay with introduction, explanatory body and conclusion; has paragraphs with clear topic sentences, is grammatically correct and virtually error free.

Acceptable: organizes essay with introduction, explanatory body and conclusion; paragraphs are not always clear; and argument wanders about

Poor: has no argument; is poorly organized; is riddled with grammatical errors

5. Recognizes that historical events are subject multiple interpretations

Excellent: recognizes that the event/theory/phenomenon under study is subject to multiple interpretations and suggest the lines of competing interpretations, referring to a variety of texts or contradictory sources

Good: acknowledges that the event under study is subject to multiple interpretations and attempts to use evidence from sources to demonstrate those interpretations

Acceptable: acknowledges that the event under study is subject to multiple interpretations but adheres to only one interpretation without serious consideration of other points of view

Poor: does not show any understanding that the past may be subject to interpretation