

Annual Assessment Report

Academic Year: 2014-2015

Department: History and Philosophy

Program(s): History/History and 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 1 and 6 this year.

1. Our graduates will be able to present a clear thesis statement.
6. Our graduates will be able to cite sources according to the conventions of the discipline.

2. What Data Were Collected

1. 12 papers were randomly selected by the chair of the Assessment Committee from two HSTR 499R courses that took place during AY 2014-2015. A faculty committee of two read the papers and evaluated them according to the following rubric:

Evaluation rubrics for Learning Outcome 1 (“be able to present a clear thesis statement”).

Excellent: There is a thesis statement that is original and/or creative in its presentation of an argument about a historical phenomenon. It is forcefully or persuasively presented in well-written language. It previews the argumentative line of the essay and the evidence that will be used.

Good: There is a thesis statement that takes a clear position on an arguable point. It is written in grammatically correct language. It demonstrates an effort to interpret a historical phenomenon.

Acceptable: There is a thesis statement that takes a position on an arguable point, but it may not be fully developed. It is largely free of grammatical errors.

Unacceptable: There is no recognizable thesis or it is unintelligible due to grammatical errors.

2. 12 papers were randomly selected by the chair of the Assessment Committee from two HSTR 499R courses that took place during AY 2014-2015. A faculty committee of two read the papers and evaluated them according to the following rubric:

Evaluation rubrics for Learning Outcome 6 (“be able to cite sources according to the conventions of the discipline”).

Excellent: citations meet journal standards of accuracy, consistency and punctuation.

Good: citations are consistent, with full bibliographic information that permits traceability; there may be errors of punctuation.

Acceptable: citations have full bibliographic information that permits traceability; there may be inconsistency in style and errors of punctuation.

Unacceptable: incomplete bibliographic information that does not permit traceability; so many errors in style and punctuation as to make information unusable.

3. What Was Learned

1. Learning Outcome 1: be able to present a clear thesis statement

Excellent	58.3%
Good	41.7%
Acceptable	0%
Unacceptable	0%

Total “Acceptable” and better: 100%. This result meets the goal of 75% of our majors being able to write an acceptable, clear thesis statement. However, the committee noted some areas that warrant improvement.

6. Learning Outcome 6: be able to cite sources according to the conventions of the discipline

Excellent	25%
Good	33.3%
Acceptable	41.7%
Unacceptable	0%

Total “Acceptable” and better: 100%. Again, this evaluation met the department’s goal. Notably, the majority of essays from both classes integrated the use of primary sources and scholarly articles and books, many of which were not from on-line sources. Although the majority of the essays’ citations allowed traceability, the committee noted a need for more attention to the details of CMS formatting (e.g., distinguishing between *note* and *bibliographic* format, punctuation).

4. How We Responded

1. **Faculty recommendations:** While we found thesis statements in all essays, and the majority of them were clear and sound, there were a few patterns that merit attention. Many would benefit from further finessing (editing for clarity of language, grammar, punctuation). A couple lacked originality or were overly general. The most impressive thesis paragraphs included a preview/roadmap of the argumentation to come, identified the evidence base (highlighting originality of sources), and engaged with the wider scholarly debate. All classes

in which students write papers of historical analysis should continue to focus on training students to write very focused and cogent thesis statements. As part of their thesis development, students also should be encouraged to give a preview of their sub-arguments or key points, to highlight their source base, and to consider how their work relates to other scholars who wrote on related topics.

- **Faculty recommendation:** A handful of these essays offered exemplary, in-depth analysis of primary source materials, and all essays combined work with both primary and secondary sources. As we know, however, not all sources were created equal and as the internet makes many materials available with just a few clicks of the mouse button, it becomes even more important to be critical readers. Thus, to avoid the cut-and-paste-from-random-websites phenomenon, faculty must encourage students to pay close attention to the details – and, thus, trustworthiness -- of their sources. Having full citation data is a key step in evaluating the reliability and usefulness of a source. In addition to providing additional guidance to our own students, faculty should take advantage of the library research workshops offered by Prof. Jan Zauha, reference library liaison to the department. As a previous committee noted, a “tricky problem” continues to plague us: “until the capstone course, students do not get a great deal of research experience because upper-division history courses typically have 40 students, making it almost impossible to monitor and develop research papers with integrity.” To address this issue and to ensure that students produce the most commendable capstone essays possible, the department should continue its program-level discussions regarding integrating in-depth research skills into all levels of the history major.
- **General Faculty recommendation:** All instructors in the history department should be (a) periodically reminded of the learning outcomes objectives and (b) provided the assessment rubrics, ideally prior to start of each semester. Such information can serve as a guide as faculty members devise readings, activities, and assignments, and encourage them to emphasize the desired skills. In addition, history faculty should periodically review the learning outcomes objectives along with the assessment rubrics, honing them to more accurately reflect (and guide) our goals.

Submitted by: History faculty