Assessment Review of
History Major

The History program adopted three Student Learning Outcomes for our history majors. This report will explain the early results of our assessment program and the ways in which such assessment has altered our teaching methods.

Student Learning Outcome #1:

Students will be able to analyze and evaluate historical narratives and arguments.

Methods of assessment:
A variety of writing assignments done in-class and outside the class. See History Program Assessment for detailed list.

Problems observed:
Students are able to provide adequate factual detail but still need improvement in crafting clear and focused theses. Students need to understand that historians do not “report” “what happened,” i.e. factual detail, they also explain why events or trends occurred as they did.

Student Learning Outcome #2:

Students will be able to conduct historical research

Methods of assessment:
A variety of writing assignments and research exercises

Problems observed:
Some good successes here. Students were able to locate and examine documents of various kinds and employ them in writing projects. Some students with poorer reading skills had difficulties with documents from different time periods. The language of older documents was difficult for them to read and understand.

Student Learning Outcome #3:

Students will be able to interpret economic, social, political, cultural, and technological change in a variety of contexts.

Methods of assessment:
A variety of writing assignments done in-class and outside of class.

Problems observed:
Students need better analytical skills. They should be more skeptical about sources and not automatically accept them, whether primary or secondary sources, at face value. Students also should understand that time and place and culture are important variables and that people in the past held different values and lived in different circumstances that we do. Some students are “presentist,” i.e. they interpret the past through the values held today.

Proposed solutions:
Students might benefit from the study and discussion of very controversial or one-sided historical works as a means of demonstrating the flaws in that unbalanced approach. Students might also benefit from the dissection of well-written historical articles or monographs that they might then be able to model in terms of thesis development and the method used to support generalizations. Students might benefit from the in-class study of documents from the era they will be researching, with discussions of the idiosyncrasies found in the language of the time. Students might benefit from discussion of example documents and the potential biases of the authors of those documents. Students might benefit from research/writing study groups that allow them to bring in the sources for their particular projects and assess their utility.

History faculty members will employ these methods, where applicable, to try to improve student learning outcomes and will reassess those outcomes in April, 2007.