

What is your College or School?

College of Arts & Sciences

What is your program?

History

Outcome(s): Identify the program learning outcome(s) that is/are the focus for the 2017-18 Academic Year.

In the 2017-18 academic year, the Department of History shifted its attention in assessment -- from focusing on SLO #2, "Students will develop the ability to empathize with peoples from different time periods, world regions and cultures, and social positions as a way to understand the complexity of human motivations and historical contexts," as we have in the past two years -- to taking stock of how we teach research in the capstone and courses leading up to the capstone. This shift was instigated by several simultaneous developments: frustrations voiced by some faculty teaching the capstone, other faculty's frustrations with recent research assignments in other courses, conversations with recent graduates, and conversations among ourselves.

While assessing the capstone should offer insight on all of our learning outcomes, it is especially closely related to SLO #4, "Student will learn to formulate persuasive ... arguments...."

Measures: Identify one to three ways you know students learn this outcome.

The capstone paper advances an argument in clear prose with a logical organization and draws upon well-chosen evidence from primary and secondary sources to support their argument (reflecting SLO #4)

The capstone paper is grounded in a particular historical context and attuned to the interplay between large historical forces and human actions (reflecting SLOs #1 and #2).

The capstone paper contends with debates in historiography and contradictions or gaps in the evidence in a nuanced and compelling fashion (reflecting SLO #3).

Findings: Present and analyze your findings this year about student learning in this outcome.

In August 2018, we read two capstone papers and engaged in a group conversation about each using the Collaborative Guided Inquiry Protocol and facilitated by Greg Lin and Kevin Saunders.

Both papers showed some successes in achieving SLO #2 regarding "the ability to empathize with people from different time periods, world regions and cultures, and social positions as a way to understand the complexity of human motivations and historical contexts." Perhaps this is a reflection of two years of focusing on that student learning outcome.

One of the papers also demonstrated an understanding of "history as a constructed narrative ... shaped by the narrators' world view" (SLO #3). This paper attempted to engage with debates

between historians.

Both papers demonstrated shortcomings in achieving SLOs#1 and #4, especially in regard to either grounding the paper in a particular historical context or analyzing change over time in a logical fashion (SLO #1), and with respect to the use of evidence and analysis of the evidence (SLO #4).

Actions: Discuss next steps and action items for what the department will do based upon its findings and analysis.

The Collaborative Guided Inquiry affirmed several steps the department has already put in motion. It affirmed our collective sense that the one-semester capstone may attempt to teach too much in too short a period of time and do it too close to the end of students' college careers. Some students arrive in the capstone prepared to do research, but others do not. Introducing basic research skills and giving students assignments to practice those skills -- developing a research question, developing annotated bibliographies, choosing relevant sources from them, reading, analyzing, and writing about primary and secondary sources -- is learning that can be practiced and reinforced earlier in the department's curriculum. We are in the process of submitting a proposal for a new course, HIST 100 Doing History: the Historian's Craft, as a new required component in the history major to be taken as a sophomore or junior to better prepare students for the capstone.

On our agenda for our next department meeting will be: what kinds of things can we do in our other courses to help students develop their knowledge and practice the skills that came up short in the Collaborative Guided Inquiry? For example, can we design smaller assignments to better familiarize students with historiographical debates, to choose primary sources to explore a question, to deal with contradictions in the evidence? We will also consider developing some shared language for research and writing mechanics to better reinforce skill building with clarity across our courses.

The Collaborative Guided Inquiry discussion also suggests that our focus on the empathy learning outcome (SLO #2) yielded some positive results. We take that as an encouraging outcome of this assessment cycle.

Time Finished: 2018-09-07 14:56:48