Emory University

2021-2023 Assessment Report for Educational Programs

Program: Department of History	Date Submitted: May 30, 2023
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I. Mission

It is a core part of the mission of the Department of History to provide a diverse, rich, and empowering undergraduate program as a central component of a liberal arts education. The undergraduate program stresses the goals:
- to deepen students' understanding of the past and of the means and methods of studying it
- to develop skills in critical thinking and communication

II. Program Context

In AY 2021-2022, the Department of History graduated 37 majors and 7 minors, and in AY 2022-2023 those numbers were 34 majors and 9 minors. In general, by Spring semester each year the Department has had approximately 90 majors and 15 minors over the past two years. This includes several joint majors in Art History and History and English and History. Single History majors must take 11 courses, at least seven at 300-level or above, including two capstone 4-credit hour junior-senior research colloquia.

III. Learning Outcomes and Assessment Methods

One of the main changes and efforts at improvement over the present reporting period has involved the renovation of our system of assessment following suggestions made by the College in response to the previous report of Fall 2021.

In the **previous system**, the Department assessed the development of student research and writing skills across the undergraduate years according to our rubric of **five central intended learning outcomes for student critical and historical thinking and communication**, beginning with top student papers from the First Year Seminars (HIST 190s) and then comparing the data with that from senior majors in the capstone junior-senior 400-level colloquia as well as with the top students' research papers from those colloquia (the ones nominated from each colloquium for the research prize in History). Doing so allowed us to get both quantitative data and a qualitative assessment of trends and outcomes in student writing.

At the suggestion of the College, we have shifted to a **new system** whereby we measure student achievement first among second- and third-year History majors in 300-level courses, to establish a baseline from which we can then compare the results from the senior majors in the 400-level colloquia. We no longer single out best papers for qualitative analysis. This new system has just begun to be implemented over the past three semesters.

Independently, the Undergraduate Studies Committee also **revised the previous rubric of Learning Outcomes slightly** to accord better with current views of best practice in historical research and writing: to clarify the centrality of change over time and achieve a better balance of diachronic and synchronic analysis in LO #1; to be more open-ended about appropriate methods for primary source interpretation in LO #2; and to clarify assessment of the formulation of an appropriate historical research question in LO #4. (For the original rubric of five intended learning outcomes as adopted in 2009, see Appendix A; for the amended rubric as adopted in March 2022 see Appendix B).

The Learning Outcomes are therefore now as follows:

Learning Outcome #1	Students will demonstrate a clear understanding of change over time.
Learning Outcome #2	Students will persuasively analyze and interpret primary sources.
Learning Outcome #3	Students will demonstrate an ability to construct an historical argument in clear and effective prose.
Learning Outcome #4	Students will demonstrate an ability to construct an independent research project.
Learning Outcome #5	Students will demonstrate an ability to articulate orally an historical argument or interpretation relating to their research.

Learning Outcomes #1-3 are assessed by the course instructors on the basis of the capstone research papers by senior majors in the 400-level colloquia and on the basis of the varied writing assignments in the 300-level courses. Learning Outcome #4 considers the scaffolded preparatory assignments as well as the final essays. Learning Outcome #5 considers the final oral presentations plus week-by-week participation in discussion (only for the colloquia, since not all 300-level courses have full presentations given the often larger numbers of students enrolled). Each Learning Outcome is assessed on the basis of the Department rubric, which sets out the various aspirations and levels of achievement on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest level of achievement ("excellent"). As an **achievement target**, we aim to record scores of **4 and above** (4 being "accomplished"). The reports from individual instructors are then gathered and the data analyzed and discussed by the Undergraduate Studies Committee (USC), usually for each AY in the ensuing Fall semester.

As a result of the qualitative analysis of student papers by the USC in Fall 2021, and of the discussions within the Department led by the DUS in AY 2021-2022 on the desired

aims and learning outcomes of 300-level courses, the USC also last year identified **three areas for specific attention and improvement in 300-level courses**, namely:

- awareness of genre in relation to audience
- structure of essays
- selection and use of evidence

These aims and areas for improvement therefore also featured in our assessment and analysis of the data in this cycle.

As a further area in which we believe the Department has made improvements in pedagogical practice over the past three years, we also highlight the ongoing efforts to address matters of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the curriculum and in the classroom. We refer back in part to the fact that in order to prepare for the full year of online teaching in AY 2020-21, Emory College mandated a special **online training course** for instructors (ECOTS). In addition to exposing faculty to best practice in online education, the course also highlighted **inclusive pedagogy and universal syllabus design**. This process raised the level of awareness regarding the language used and classroom policies stipulated in syllabi as well as the visual element of syllabus design, in order to appear as student-centric, open, and welcoming as possible to students of all backgrounds, whether First Generation, neurodiverse, gender non-binary, or in terms of race, ethnicity, and national origin. Our syllabi and teaching have certainly become more accessible and inclusive through this process and experience. We have also gained flexibility in using teaching technology even with the gradual return to "normal" conditions. Time and effort spent supporting students' needs also increased dramatically during the pandemic and has not returned to a pre-COVID normal. In general, the strains and the toll on mental health of the past several years have been enormous for students, faculty, and staff, and we still suffer from their effects, but the experience has not been entirely without positive legacies.

Even more broadly, while issues of race, class, and gender have long been mainstays of historical teaching at Emory as elsewhere, they have become still more so over the past several years as part of the effort to counter the effects and legacies of systemic racism and gender stereotyping and the obstacles faced by First Generation students. Raising awareness of how these problems have manifested themselves historically in various places and times up to the present is part of this effort (at the level of the content of our teaching). At the same time, we try to integrate these considerations into how we interact with students in the classroom (the manner and approach of our teaching). We are making ongoing exertions to create open and inclusive learning environments in this respect as well. We have also made progress in offering a diverse curriculum in which issues of race, gender, and class are front and center, and in which students of all backgrounds can find courses and content that speak to the histories and present experiences of the communities with which they identify. In all these respects, we have been greatly assisted by the addition of several new faculty members from underrepresented groups who have themselves added to the diversity of offerings and the sensibility with regard to our pedagogical approaches. The process of change and awareness, however, is something that all of our faculty have embraced.

Within courses, conscious endeavors to make syllabi more diverse and representative through the incorporation of primary sources and scholarly contributions from women and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color actors had already been ongoing before the period of this assessment report, yet they have certainly moved even more into the foreground as part of the anti-racist campaign for social justice and equity over the past three years.

IV. Assessment Summary and Potential Improvements

We first deal with the **400-level junior-senior colloquium courses**, where there is for the most part continuity with previous assessment reporting procedures (making allowances for the minor changes to the assessment rubric in March 2022 outlined above). The quantitative results were as follows:

Year/Sem. 400-level	Learning Outcome #1	Learning Outcome #2	Learning Outcome #3	Learning Outcome #4	Learning Outcome #5	Overall Avg.
AY 2021-2022 N = 33	4.45	4.12	4.24	4.12	4.36	4.26
Fall 2022 N = 23	4.61	4.52	4.13	4.57	4.09	4.38
Total Fall 2021 - Fall 2022	4.52	4.29	4.20	4.30	4.25	4.31

In discussing the results, we found them strong in topping 4.0 in all cases, often considerably. Again, this equates to "accomplished" and "excellent" use of skills in our scoring of the various aspirational skill levels in the Learning Outcomes.

The overall average was **4.45** in the **Fall 2021** report and **4.22** in the previous report of **Fall 2019**. The overall average of **4.31 this time** sits in the middle of those two prior results. We even noted that the overall average in Spring 2022 was 4.4, thus close to the 4.38 of Fall 2022 and to the 4.45 of the previous report. Fall semester 2021 was lower at 4.09 and brought the average down for that AY. This result could be owing to statistical variance, but our sense was that it might have reflected an actual trend, where Fall 2021 was the first semester back from online learning and still in the midst of the pandemic, which presented particularly difficult circumstances for both students and faculty. Taking everything into consideration, we thus believe that the results hold up well and strongly in comparison with previous reporting periods and suggest that **we continue to prepare our students well in the skillset expected of historians and liberal arts graduates.**

In considering the individual Learning Outcomes (LO), we noted that **LO #1** involving the application of chronological analysis of change and continuity over time **saw the clear strongest results**. For a program in History it is reassuring that our students are so attuned to these issues and that we do a sound job of helping them hone those skills. LO #2 and LO #4 remained comparable to last time with solid results in between the other scores, involving use of skills for interpreting various kinds of historical sources and documents, and the ability to construct an independent research project. **LO #3** remains slightly lower than the others, regarding the construction of a historical argument and the use of clear and effective prose. **This result could suggest that we need to increase further our efforts to focus on writing at both the macro- and micro-level within the colloquia and earlier in the curriculum**, to emphasize both structure and argument on the one hand and line editing on the other. LO #5 regarding oral presentation skills had declined slightly since the previous report. Here too renewed attention and awareness can help us target these skills for development.

For both LO #5 and #3 we note that the transition from Continuing Writing to Continuing Communication in the ECAS GER system should help us focus on and improve both results. To the extent that awareness of genre and audience was also identified as an area for improvement in the report of Fall 2021, the move to the Continuing Communication framework should help us boost students' skills in that regard as well.

Our 400-level junior-senior colloquia all carry the W tag for Continuing Writing GER courses, and some 200- and 300-level courses carry that tag as well.

300-level courses:
Having designed the new rubric, we collected data for the 300-level courses for the first time in Spring 2022, and then again in Fall 2022, each time requesting reports from half of the faculty teaching such courses on a rolling basis. Having the data for the semesters Spring 2022 and Fall 2022 helps to establish a baseline for comparison, to which we will add that from Spring 2023 and beyond. The results were:

Year/Sem. 300-level	Learning Outcome #1	Learning Outcome #2	Learning Outcome #3	Learning Outcome #4	Overall Avg.
Spring 2022 N = 12	4.67	4.5	4.67	4.25	4.52
Fall 2022 N = 4	4.75	4.75	4.75	4.75	4.75
Total Spring 2022 – Fall 2022	4.69	4.56	4.69	4.38	4.58

These results will give us some baseline moving forward, and point to successful outcomes, but the overall number of datapoints was surprisingly low and reduces the

statistical significance of the data. In one of the courses for which we requested a report, there was in fact no second- or third-year History major in the class.

Examining the specific learning outcomes, again **LO #1** regarding change and continuity over time **saw the strongest scores** and is an encouraging sign for a program in History. In this case **the scores for LO #3 were just as high**, for constructing a historical argument in effective prose, while LO #2 involving interpretation of historical sources was not far behind and again very strong. LO #4 was again slightly below the others. Though still strong, this result could indicate a need to focus more on designing an effective research project in 300-level courses, which could in turn lift the results for that aspiration in the 400-level junior-senior colloquia.

We also discussed the question of **possible trends from 300- to 400-level**. In part because the number of entries for the 300-level courses was relatively small, we did not feel confident in placing too much significance on the fact that the numbers were higher at 300 than at 400 level. We did think, however, that it was not an unlikely result and might hold up in future as well. The point is not that students decrease in their skill level in moving higher up the curriculum or that they have not learned in the introductory level courses. Instead, we tend to assess how well the students deploy their skills in the tasks they are assigned at each level rather than assessing the skills according to some ideal standard that could be easily measurable, or that might produce a trend ascending continuously upward from introductory to advanced courses. The assignments are more demanding at the 400-level, and the skill level needs to rise simply to maintain the same level of achievement. This trend is probably most clearly seen in LO #4, where there is a step change in complexity in the construction of a semester-long research project ending in a paper of circa 20 pages when compared to that needed to construct and complete a project involving a paper of circa 10 pages. The expectations for chronological analysis, interpretation of primary sources, and historical argumentation and writing also rise in moving to the 400-level, as instructors and students together tackle higher, deeper, and more complex questions at an increasingly professional level. We believe we prepare our majors well to succeed at those more demanding tasks and can see the results in the projects they produce. The students also mature and grow in confidence as well as in skills in ways that are more difficult to measure in these capstone courses, which are intensive and challenging but also particularly rewarding for the students and the faculty alike. This sense of achievement, as well as of learning and satisfaction, is reflected in the student evaluations for these courses, which are among the highest in the History curriculum, often well above 8 on a 9-point scale.

V. Faculty Involvement

The assessment data and results were discussed in a meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee on April 25, 2023, as the basis for the report here submitted. A draft of the report was then provided for feedback and revision in mid-May before going to the Department Chair and the Advisory Committee for feedback and final edits and approval.

The full faculty were also involved in discussions of the previous report of Fall 2021 and implementation of its recommendations at multiple department meetings over the past four semesters, and thus have shaped the process leading to the new report. Further discussion of the present report and its recommendations will in turn take place beginning next year.

VI. Future Assessment Plans

Regarding assessment plans for the future, we will **above all aim to bed down and calibrate the new system and track the data across the present period and the next**. Doing so will facilitate longitudinal comparisons and tracing trends over time. We hope to see some improvement with LO's #3, 4, and 5, but still believe that the teaching and curriculum in the Department of History is already functioning at a high level and producing strong learning outcomes; there are limits to how far these scores can rise.

Another primary aim in the next cycle will be **to acquire a larger number of datapoints for more robust assessment of the 300-level courses going forward**. To this end, we also discussed possible reasons for the lower-than-expected numbers of students in these categories. One is that the known problem at the senior level with OPUS – that it can be difficult to distinguish between actual seniors and those who read out as such given their total number of credits even as juniors – may also be reducing the number of those majors who appear as sophomores or juniors. Added to this issue is the fact that many students do not declare a major until well into their sophomore years – and sometimes even in their junior years – which further reduces the likely pool of those we would analyze in these courses. We will try to raise awareness of the OPUS issue at 300-level as we do for senior grades and reporting at the 400-level, but the main recommendation we have going forward is to collect data from more 300-level courses. Instead of requesting the forms from half of those teaching such courses, we will request them of all those who are teaching a 300-level course in future, unless they are also doing a report for a colloquium in that semester (so as not to have to do two at once). Given that there do appear to be fewer second- and third-year majors in the 300-level courses than we originally thought (these courses remain popular with non-majors as well), we felt that filling out the report was less onerous than we had originally feared, hence the request to do a few more would not unduly increase the administrative workload.

We will also be **collecting syllabi from 300-level courses and discussing learning outcomes in the Undergraduate Studies Committee and with the whole Department next year**, as had been planned for the end of this cycle, keeping in mind the results of this and the previous round of assessment reporting. Considering ways in which Learning Outcomes #3, 4, and 5 might be bolstered in these courses, or even earlier in the curriculum, will be an important part of this process. Again, as the College institutes its new GER regime with a revised Continuing Communication requirement, we will be converting many of the existing writing courses into the new Continuing Communication model at 200-, 300-, and 400-level, with more attention to varied audiences, genres, and modes of writing as well as to oral, visual, and other media and multimodal means of

communication (several instructors had already been integrating such assignments and projects in any case). Doing so should facilitate progress in these areas.

VII. Supporting Documentation

Appendix A

History Department Rubric from 2009 (Aspiration and Assessment Scale)

Appendix B

History Department Rubric as amended March 2022 (Aspiration and Assessment Scale)

VIII. Review Process

Please forward your 2021-2023 assessment report to the chair of your department for review and signature. This review will ensure that the information included in this report is accurate and that your program is engaged in a systematic process of continuous improvement.

Department Chair Signature:

Date: May 30, 2023

HISTORY DEPARTMENT RUBRICS (Aspiration and Assessment Scale)

Aspiration	5 (Excellent)	4 (Accomplished)	3 (Acceptable)	2 (Insufficient)	1 (Unacceptable)
1. Students will demonstrate a clear understanding of change over time using the historical method.	Has clear command over historical causality and contingency; demonstrates, through the use of primary source material, awareness of chronological nature of evidence; diachronic, not simply synchronic explanation used throughout the work	Has understanding of historical causality and contingency; demonstrates through the use of secondary sources clear chronological awareness; supplements synchronic explanation with diachronic analysis throughout the work	Grasp of historical causality and contingency unclear; only sporadic demonstration of chronological awareness in use of evidence; primarily synchronic explanation	Little or no understanding of historical causality and contingency; chronological awareness present in narration but not in use of evidence; exclusively synchronic explanation	Ahistorical or determinist explanation for events ("it is human nature to . . ."); absence of chronological awareness in use of evidence; explanation too confused to break down between synchronic and diachronic
2. Students will demonstrate an ability to analyze historical sources through a variety of methods.	Deploys primary historical sources as evidence and interprets through sophisticated methods of analysis (textual, statistical, etc.)	Deploys primary historical sources as evidence and interprets with sufficient use of methodology	Deploys primarily secondary sources with a sprinkling of primary historical sources as evidence; interpretation not linked to clear methodology	Deploys only secondary sources as evidence; little or no interpretation of source base.	Deploys only historical generalities as evidence; no analysis of source base.
3. Students will demonstrate an ability to construct an historical argument in a clear and effective prose.	Argument controlled by clear, precise, well-defined thesis; ideas are original and use well-chosen examples as evidence, persuasive reasoning used to consistently develop and support argument	Clear specific thesis central to the argument; develops a main argument with clear major points and appropriate supporting detail as evidence	Argument controlled by general central thesis; however, thesis undermined by weak organization, shallow analysis, insufficiently articulated ideas or unsupported generalizations	Vague thesis or thesis is not central to the argument; argument is discursive as it tends to merely narrate or digress from one topic to another	No discernible thesis governs the argument; little or no development of evidence (essay is mostly a list of facts)
4. Students will demonstrate an ability to construct an independent research project.	Student constructed a clear historical hypothesis and identified the secondary literature, primary sources and most effective historical methodology to address it	Student constructed a research hypothesis and identified the secondary literature and primary sources to address it. Historical methodology underdeveloped.	Student constructed a research hypothesis and identified the secondary literature to address it. Primary sources not identified historical methodology underdeveloped.	Student constructed a research hypothesis. No secondary literature, primary or historical methodology developed to pursue it.	No clear research hypothesis constructed.
5. Students will demonstrate an ability to articulate orally an historical argument or interpretation relating to their research.	Student speaks clearly and effectively, showing an ability to articulate his/her argument in correct English using complex sentences and appropriate vocabulary. Student engages with the audience and is able to respond to questions. Student makes appropriate use of allotted time and is well organized.	Student does many of these things, but not all. Student is a good but not excellent speaker.	Student does some of these things, but not all. Student is an adequate speaker.	Student does only a few of these things. Student is a weak speaker.	Student is a poor speaker, showing little ability to present a coherent oral argument.

HISTORY DEPARTMENT RUBRICS (Aspiration and Assessment Scale)

Aspiration	5 (Excellent)	4 (Accomplished)	3 (Acceptable)	2 (Insufficient)	1 (Unacceptable)
1. Students will demonstrate a clear understanding of change over time.	Demonstrates an excellent command of historical causality and contingency; is sensitive to change over time; synchronic explanation, when used, is carefully historicized.	Demonstrates an understanding of historical causality and contingency; is moderately sensitive to change over time; synchronic explanation, when used, is historicized.	Grasp of historical causality and contingency unclear; only sporadic demonstration of chronological awareness in use of evidence; synchronic explanation, when used, is loosely historicized.	Little or no understanding of historical causality and contingency; chronological awareness present in narration but not in use of evidence; synchronic explanation, when used, is not historicized.	Ahistorical or determinist explanation for events ("it is human nature to . . ."); absence of chronological awareness in use of evidence; explanation too confused to break down between synchronic and diachronic forms of explanation.
2. Students will persuasively analyze and interpret primary sources.	Deploys a variety of primary historical sources as evidence for an argument about the past and analyzes and interprets them with originality and sophistication.	Deploys primary historical sources as evidence for an argument about the past and analyzes and interprets them in logical and reasonable ways.	Deploys primarily secondary sources as evidence for an argument about the past (there is perhaps a sprinkling of primary historical sources referenced); analysis and interpretation of sources is sometimes uncritical, shallow, and/or superficial.	Deploys only secondary sources as evidence for an argument about the past; analysis and engagement with secondary sources is uncritical, shallow, and/or superficial.	Deploys only historical generalities as evidence; no analysis of source base.
3. Students will demonstrate an ability to construct an historical argument in a clear and effective prose.	Argument controlled by clear, precise, well-defined thesis; ideas are original and use well-chosen examples as evidence; persuasive reasoning used to consistently develop and support argument	Clear specific thesis central to the argument; develops a main argument with clear major points and appropriate supporting detail as evidence	Argument controlled by general central thesis; however, thesis undermined by weak organization, shallow analysis, insufficiently articulated ideas or unsupported generalizations	Vague thesis or thesis that is not central to the argument; argument tends to merely narrate or digress from one topic to another	No discernible thesis governs the argument; little or no development of evidence
4. Students will demonstrate an ability to construct an independent research project.	Articulates a historical research question of appropriate scope, identifies the most appropriate secondary literature in which to situate the argument, finds primary sources that effectively answer the research question.	Articulates a historical research question of appropriate scope. Uses secondary literature to frame the argument and primary sources used to answer the research question. Sources are adequate, but not as comprehensive or precise as they might be.	Articulates a historical research question of questionable scope. Uses secondary literature to frame the argument. Scant or no primary sources used to answer the research question.	Articulates a historical research question that is too broad or not answerable given the availability of sources. Scant or no secondary and primary sources used to answer the research question.	Fails to articulate a historical research question.
5. Students will demonstrate an ability to articulate orally an historical argument or interpretation relating to their research.	Speaks clearly and effectively, showing an ability to present research findings in an accessible way. Speaks at a good volume and pace. Engages with the audience and is able to respond to questions. Makes appropriate use of allotted time and is well organized.	Does many of these things, but not all.	Does some of these things, but not all.	Does only one or two of these things.	Shows little ability to present a coherent oral argument.

Updated March 2022