

Educational Program Institutional Effectiveness Report

Degree Program: Master of Arts History

College/School: College of Arts and Sciences **Department:** History

Submission Date: December 1, 2009

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Student frames historical questions.
2. Student employs a broad range of sources.
3. Student demonstrates awareness of interpretive differences.
4. Student evaluates & analyzes primary sources.
5. Student writes clearly.
6. Student develops an interpretation based on evidence.
7. Student grasps relevant historical facts and context.
8. Student speaks clearly.

Assessment Methods

Students are assessed on the student learning outcomes (SLOs) twice during the program. In HST 500 Historiography and Methodology, SLOs 1 – 7 are assessed through a research paper using the department Elaborated Competencies rubric; SLO 8 is assessed through class performance. At the end of the program, SLOs 1 – 7 are assessed through the theses using the same rubric; SLO 8 is assessed through the oral defense. HST 500 papers are scored by the course instructor. Theses are scored by all committee members. Results are reviewed by faculty each fall.

Summary of Assessment Results

Student learning outcome data has been collected in HST 500 since Fall 2006, and has been collected on masters theses since Spring 2007. Over the three year period, the mid-range on all SLOs for the HST 500 papers has been 2.8 to 3.4 on a 0 to 4 scale. In that course, students struggle most with awareness of interpretive differences (SLO 3). Over the 2 ½ year period of collection, the mid-range on all SLOs for the masters theses has been 3.1 to 3.7. Highest scores are consistently produced on employing a broad range of sources (SLO 2). However, evaluation of the evidence shows that too many students are still performing below expectations on SLO 4, evaluating and analyzing primary sources. Data shows the highest gains on awareness of interpretive differences (SLO 3), although, since they begin the lowest, scores on this SLO rank right in the middle, averaging 3.5.

SLO assessment results are analyzed by the graduate committee and then brought to the faculty as a whole. There has been particular concern about SLO 4 and the challenges students face in finding and using primary sources properly. A range of ideas has been discussed to improve performance in this area. Other discussions have focused on ways of raising awareness among

graduate students about specific learning outcomes, and how to foster intentionality in all graduate offerings in relation to SLOs. Those recommendations that have been approved and implemented are listed in the next section.

It is also been noted that scores have fluctuated more than expected semester to semester. This indicates that, although the rubric quality criteria are thorough in their descriptions, discussion may be needed to improve scoring consistency. The point has also been made within the program that the quality of entering graduate students, while it is improving, remains a variable that affects performance, especially in the HST 500.

Implemented Improvements Based on Assessment Results

After the first year of using the Elaborated Competencies, faculty decided that the HST 500 should explicitly reference the program SLOs and that the rubric should be distributed to students during that course. This was implemented in Fall 2008, and the Fall 2009 syllabus is attached.

The graduate committee also recommended that thesis students complete their own evaluation of skills in relation to department SLOs, to give us another data input from students. This recommendation was approved in November 2009 and will be implemented in Spring 2010.

SLO 4 has been noted as a particular weakness for students in the program. The department is addressing this area on multiple fronts. As this student learning outcome is already a part of the curriculum for most courses, it was decided that the best way to address this is through changes in instructional emphasis, and through continued efforts to encourage students to engage in archival research. The department is holding a workshop on April 9, 2010 focused on challenges, best practices, techniques, and processes used to work on this skill at all levels of the curriculum. After the workshop, the Graduate Committee and the chair will follow up with department wide recommendations and guidelines, syllabus and curriculum adjustments, rubrics, or other appropriate adjustments going forward.

Again to address SLO 4, the graduate program also applied for research resources from the Bauer Fund to sponsor a faculty-led research trip to Washington D.C. area archives in May 2010, so students can access more primary source material in thesis work. As many as six students will be making the trip. The department is also active in campus efforts to enhance library resources, including subscriptions to academic research databases, in order to provide students access to the primary sources needed for their research.

Documentation of Implemented Improvements (attached)

HST 500 Syllabus Fall 2009

History Department Faculty Meeting Minutes November 16, 2009

Primary Source Utilization Workshop Agenda

Bauer Fund Application