Appendix A

Assessment of Student Learning
Department and Program Report

Please enter the appropriate information concerning your student learning assessment activities for this year.

Academic Year of Report: 2010-11 College: College of Arts and Humanities
Department: History Program: Master of Arts in History

1. **What student learning outcomes were assessed, and why?** M.A. students were assessed during their capstone experience, consisting of either a written exam and oral defense, a thesis and oral defense, or a project and oral defense. The department created a five-part assessment rubric with a tripartite scale as follows: exceeds expectations; meets expectations; and does not meet expectations. The five categories in the rubric are: (1) Writing; (2) Research Skills/Sources; (3) Analysis; (4) Documentation; (5) Logical Organization. Some of those categories apply only to theses and projects. In particular, category 4, Documentation, is not applicable to written M.A. exams. These five categories, together, assess mastery of the field of history.

2. **How were they assessed?**

   a. **What methods were used?** Five-part assessment rubric with three possible responses to each part (exceeds expectations; meets expectations; does not meet expectations). See attached rubric for definition of “exceeds expectations,” “meets expectations,” and “does not meet expectations” for each part of the rubric. Ideally, all M.A. students will “exceed expectations” in each part.

   b. **Who was assessed?** All M.A. students who completed degree requirements in 2010-11. Three M.A. students from 2010-11 took and defended written exams. Four wrote and defended theses. One wrote and defended a project (an archival bibliography). Three others wrote and defended thesis-length research efforts that were deemed to satisfy the department’s requirements for “project” (they lacked the argumentation that would make them theses).

   c. **When was it assessed?** Each student is assessed at the time they complete the M.A. via oral defense of thesis, project, or written examination.

3. **What was learned?**

   **Total M.A. students graduated, 2010-11** 11
   M.A. exam option 3
   Project option 4
   Thesis option 4
Category One: Writing  
Exceeds expectations 4  
Meets expectations 7  
Does not meet expectations  

Category Two: Research Skills/Sources  
Exceeds expectations 1  
Meets expectations 10  
Does not meet expectations  

Category Three: Analysis  
Exceeds expectations 1  
Meets expectations 10  
Does not meet expectations  

Category Four: Documentation  
(thesis or project only)  
Exceeds expectations 2  
Meets expectations 6  
Does not meet expectations  

Category Five: Logical Organization  
Exceeds expectations 2  
Meets expectations 9  
Does not meet expectations  

Concise interpretation of results: M.A. student performance did not reach ideal levels in any category. Students on the whole performed better in writing than in other categories. Research Skills/Sources, Analysis, Documentation, and Logical Organization needed improvement. However, none of our students failed to meet expectations.

4. What will your department or program do as a result of that information? What the department has done so far this year is to change the rules for the project. We will no longer allow substandard theses to satisfy the requirements for the M.A. project. In the future, theses must pass as theses, or simply fail. Though students may opt for the project option in the future, projects will be something other than lengthy research papers. They may take the form of documentary films, bibliographies, or websites, or some other form, but not research papers. The new requirement is intended to improve the quality of M.A. capstone research.

5. What did the department or program do in response to last year’s assessment information? The department made no significant changes after last year’s assessment. However, in order to improve student performance, we had revised the graduate program in several ways during the previous two years.
a. **Thesis/Project Prospectus.** The department instituted a requirement for a prospectus from those seeking to write an M.A. thesis or project. The prospectus—a thorough description and evaluation of the research question and the sources to be used—must be turned in to the student’s thesis advisor by the end of the third week of the fourth quarter, or upon completion of 30 credits (whichever comes first). The student then defends the prospectus before his/her committee. If the student either fails to produce the prospectus or fails to defend it adequately, he/she may be asked to pursue the exam option rather than the thesis option. The objective is to steer underperforming students into a more manageable option and thereby speed time to completion of degree.

b. **Field Specialization.** For purposes of M.A. examinations, students must choose a first field and second field. The second field must be in a country and/or topic outside the scope of the first field. Requiring field specialization requires students to master content and historiography that they can then use in their own teaching.

c. **Field Bibliography.** The department instituted a “field bibliography” course to help students acquaint themselves with the broad historiography in his/her field. The field bibliography is taken as an independent study (History 596) but may be substituted for a research or reading seminar (History 515 and 512, respectively). The objective is to familiarize PhD program-bound students with historiography.

d. **Changes to foreign language requirement.** The department made the foreign-language requirement for students writing theses optional. It may be deployed at the discretion of the advisor. This means that students who do not need to master a foreign language in order to write the thesis no longer have to fulfill the foreign language requirement. The objective is to speed time to completion while maintaining high language standards for students specializing in non-U.S. subject areas.

e. **Minimum GPA for Teaching Assistants.** The department set a baseline GPA of 3.5 for teaching assistants who wish to be continued for a second year. All teaching assistants may reapply for a second year, but only those with a 3.5 GPA or above in CWU’s M.A. program can expect to be renewed (though the graduate committee does reserve the right to deny them for other reasons, including poor performance as assistants). The objective here is to improve the quality of teaching assistants and to motivate assistants to maintain high grades. In previous years, all first-year teaching assistants could expect automatic reappointment for a second year.

6. **Questions or suggestions concerning Assessment of Student Learning at Central Washington University.** The major shortcoming of the History M.A. assessment rubric is its inability to adequately assess M.A. examinations. Department members have repeatedly found the quality of M.A. exams to be low. Some faculty want students to show better understanding of historiography. Others want students to show better understanding of content (dates, names, trends, social movements, legislation, and the like). As of now, our assessment rubric allows us to assess knowledge of historiography but not content. Future exams—which have varied greatly in the past—need to be
designed to allow students to demonstrate mastery of both content and historiography. The department’s assessment rubric must be altered to measure both.