Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes
Degree Program Report

College: Arts and Humanities
Program: History BA
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Degree: BA

1. What student learning outcomes were assessed this year, and why?

Learning Outcomes Assessed:

A. To analyze primary and secondary sources, understand their argument and approach, and then compare them with other works
B. To develop critical and analytical skills in written exercises, including a significant research paper
C. To use scholarly historical resources and reference tools of a university library

Reasons for Assessing the Outcomes

Logical analysis of primary and secondary sources, developing analytical skills for a significant research project, and knowing how to use the research tools of a library are essential skills for a historian, whether they end up teaching or pursuing research endeavors. History majors, who are required to take History 481: Senior Thesis as they complete their degree, were assessed on their final capstone research papers. The Department faculty 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; and 5. Logical Organization (see attachment). Our goal is that 75% of our majors will reach “meets expectations” or “exceeds expectations” in each category.

Link to CWU Strategic Plan:
http://www.cwu.edu/strategic-planning/strategic-plan

- Outcome 1.1.1: Students will achieve programmatic learning outcomes.
- Outcome 1.1.3: Students and faculty will be increasingly engaged in the learning process in and outside the classroom.
- Outcome 3.1.1: Sustain participation by faculty, students, and staff in quality research, scholarship, and creative expression.

2. How were the student learning outcomes assessed?

A) What methods were used?

Department faculty evaluating research papers in HIST 481 (direct method) used a five-part assessment rubric, with three possible responses to each part: exceeds expectations, meets expectations, and does not meet expectations. The standard of mastery is 75% percent of majors
will meet or exceed expectations in the part of the rubric related to each outcome assessed: outcome A relates to area II of the rubric; outcome B relates to area III; outcome C relates to area II of the rubric. This assessment method assesses both performance and knowledge.

B) Who was assessed?

- All history majors enrolled in HIST 481 in Fall 2014 (9 students) and Spring 2015 (18 students)
- 27
- We did a survey with 22 of 27 students responding, but the survey is not one of the assessment methods in our Program Assessment Plan. We currently use the survey to augment some of the quantitative data for internal department discussions.

C) When was it assessed?

- Each major was assessed at the time he or she completed the final original research paper required in the class. The students are seniors so this assessment is at the end of the degree.

3. What was learned?

Results for Outcome A are in Area II Research/Sources in the table below
Results for Outcome B are in Area III Analysis in the table below
Results for Outcome C are in Area II Research/Sources in the table below

It is clear that we did not meet our level of mastery of having 75% of our majors meet or exceed expectations for any of the three outcomes. In the case of outcome A, 67% reached the mastery level, for outcome B 56%, and for outcome C 67%. In fact, our majors did not meet our level of mastery in any area of the rubric, though Writing came closest with 74%. These results are an aberration and we do not want to make significant changes based on one year of results. Nevertheless, we will take these results seriously as we continue to think about our senior thesis capstone course, and program as a whole.
4. What will the department or program do as a result of that information?

We made some significant changes last year to our assessment process and to our research and writing courses that are so critically important to our program. Because the results this year are
an aberration, we will monitor our results closely next year and beyond, to see if this aberration becomes a trend warranting additional changes. We did discuss the fact that one quarter is not enough time to do a research project of the kind we require in our HIST 481 class. One thing we will do is to examine the possibility of a two-quarter thesis course. We will look at issues concerning student scheduling, faculty workload, and department goals in talking about this over the next year as we start the program review process.

We will keep emphasizing the need for, and expectations of HIST 302 faculty to administer, the HIST 302 Research Project Assessment.

Finally, an initiative for 2015-16 is to increase our program’s outreach to current students, alumni, and potential donors. To this end, a department blog, departmental newsletters, and greater presence on Facebook and Twitter are new vehicles designed to report on these changes and to report on how these changes (and those made over the past couple review cycles as a result of assessment) are resulting in increased student learning.

5. What did the department or program do in response to previous years’ assessment results, and what was the effect of those changes?

Changes Based on Previous Years’ Assessment Results

To better meet our assessment goals, the Department formed an Assessment Committee and appointed an Undergraduate Coordinator and Committee. The purpose of the Assessment Committee is to consider more effective assessment measures of our undergraduate program. The charge of the Undergraduate Committee is to recruit and retain History students during this time of dwindling numbers in the liberal arts. So far, the Undergraduate Committee has revised our rubrics and narrative senior exit surveys and developed initiatives for promoting the discipline and Department to local high school students and (with the History Club) current CWU students. The Committee has also devised new course offerings to appeal to a broader student base (Genealogy, Material Culture, Food in Global History); to promote interdisciplinarity (e.g., literary and film history); and to meet different student needs through hybrid, online and distance courses. In collaboration with Museum Studies, the Department is in the early stages of planning a high-demand specialization in public history.

For all students, but especially students in HIST 302 which is the precursor to HIST 481, faculty agreed to assign preliminary components to the final research paper, such as proposals, primary source analyses, historiographical essays, annotated bibliographies, citation exercises, and/or outlines, which will help raise success rates in individual categories, both in 302 and 481. New faculty in the Department familiarized themselves with the rubric and results, and all faculty agreed to focus special attention on the areas of Research and Analysis for HIST 302 students. The Department agreed to collect and save data from all HIST 302 and HIST 481 courses
Effects of Previous Changes

Previous changes have led to thesis instructors requiring a formal research proposal in HIST 481, which has helped students to get focused early in the research process. It also allows for more meaningful feedback early in the process.

Changes in the exit surveys have increased student engagement with the surveys – a greater percentage of students fill them out with helpful answers.

We have enhanced our recruitment efforts greatly. For example, several faculty have visited community colleges and we will soon be sending letters to high schools where our alums are teaching history.

Changes to the Assessment Plan and Method as a result of Assessment Process and Results

Although we have tinkered with our rubric in the past, it has come to our attention that our assessment plan and method need revision. As it stands, there are several issues with the plan and method of assessment:

- Our four student learning outcomes are linked to only two of the five areas in our assessment rubric. We will revise the SLOs so they link to all five areas in the rubric
- We are assessing only at the end of our program. It would be useful to add as a method our rubric for HIST 302 – the foundation course for the major that is a precursor to HIST 481. We plan to incorporate the HIST 302 rubric into our plan as an assessment method