

PSLO2
Demonstrate ability to master critical skills of the historical discipline.
Portfolio Assessment

A scheduled five-year review of History major portfolios occurred in June, 2016. Faculty are asked to place an example of student writing with the appropriate assessment rubric in portfolio at the end of each semester for each history major. For the assessment period under review (Spring 2011-Spring 2016), the department identified 69 portfolios. Only 34 of those contained more than one graded item.

Significant caveats must be identified before continuing with assessment.

- The assessment rubric changed in 2014. Some portfolios use the old, strictly writing based, rubric. Some portfolios include assignments using the old rubric and the new one consistent with USLOs. Copies of both rubrics are included with this report.
- Not all faculty place materials in portfolios regularly. The department relies on a few adjunct faculty. Other faculty have appointments in which most of their duties at Washburn are not History related. The sum results in incomplete portfolios.
- Not all faculty complete the rubric for each item entered into portfolios.
- Students become History majors at different points in their educational trajectories. Some have taken multiple history courses before declaring the major. In those cases there is less material in the portfolios to assess.

The Rubrics

Rubric #1, the old rubric, had four categories consistent with previous PSLOs. Those categories were

- Reading intelligently
- Writing effectively
- Comprehension (Processing information)
- Content (Course objectives)

Items for each category were scored on a scale from one to four, one being the highest. There were not identified targets for each ranking.

Rubric #2, the new rubric, has five headings with subcategories. Four of the five headings evolved from the old rubric. The subcategories are consistent with items assessed as part of the general education process and the "Other" rubric used annually by the department. The targets for all of the subcategories are defined with each of those rubrics.

- Writing effectively (Subcategories: Clearing developed thesis, Construction of a clear argument, understanding of writing mechanics.)
- Reading intelligently (Subcategories: Comprehension of written material, critical evaluation of sources, ability to contextualize source material.)

- Processing information (Subcategories: Effective analysis, integrates material in support of analysis, critical thinking)
- “Doing History:” (Subcategories: Understands disciplinary characteristics of history, comprehends the nature of primary sources, formulates historical questions)
- Course objectives (Subcategories: Understands the chronological sweep of material covered, comprehends major themes and issues in material, identifies significance of major figures in material)

Items for each category are scored on a scale of one (highest) to four (lowest). The targets for the subcategories are identified in other rubrics.

Ten of the 34 portfolios were not reviewed because they included non-comparable samples (in-class tests and take-home essays in the same portfolio) and/or did not have rubrics completed for each article included in the portfolio. Of the remaining portfolios, six represented strong students who consistently scored ones across all categories in all documents included in the portfolios. Eight demonstrated limited improvement. In those cases, students improved one point (from a three to a two or a two to a one) in one category but remained consistent in their marks otherwise. Eight demonstrated dramatic improvement, improving one point in most or all categories over the course of their careers as History majors. These students became markedly better readers, writers, thinkers, and better mastered critical historical skills.

Action Items Going Forward

- Consistent data collection. This point includes guarding against rubric shifts in the next five years in order to have a consistent data pool. It also includes working with faculty to include one item from each History major with its appropriate rubric in the portfolio at the culmination of every semester.
- Better identification of History majors. Faculty need to work with our administrative assistant to provide us with an updated list of majors at the conclusion of every semester. This will help us create portfolios for new majors as needed but also will help us remove the portfolios of students who change majors away from History. The new Declaration of Major process complicates identification of majors because the Department’s administrative assistant no longer receives electronic notification when a student declares his or her major.
- Use data and communication methods to identify students whose progress is more or less static to address their individual needs. The limited evidence we have suggests that we do not have a significant curriculum problem as most students either remain strong or improve dramatically. We need to work with those students who have plateaued.

Course Grades Assessment

Course grades are the most basic measure of assessment to determine whether or not students mastered the critical skills of the historical discipline in any given course. This PSLO applies this assessment year, 2015-2016, to HI100, 101, 102, 111, and 112. A thorough breakdown in grades is included in the grades spreadsheet submitted with this report. The following tables relate the percentage of students who received a B or better or a C or better in the assessed courses in the summer, fall, and spring semesters.

Summer 2015	% Students Received a C or Better	% Students Received a B or Better	Total Students
HI100	95	90	21
HI101	80	80	10
HI102	100	100	9
HI111	68	50	22
HI112	100	91	11

Fall 2016	% Students Received a C or Better	% Students Received a B or Better	Total Students
HI100	80	69	56
HI101	94	63	32
HI102	73	71	62
HI111 campus	88	71	83
HI111 concurrent	96	84	198
HI111 total	94	80	281
HI112	87	71	68

Spring 2016	% Students Received a C or Better	% Students Received a B or Better	Total Students
HI100	85	65	54
HI101	73	58	40
HI102	90	57	30
HI111	85	71	96
HI112 campus	82	73	44
HI112 concurrent	99	86	172
HI112 total	96	83	216

If we use 70 percent of students received a C or better in courses as an indicator that most students mastered the skills of the historical discipline then all seventeen categories of courses met the standard. The average for the seventeen course categories is 91 percent, or 91 percent of students who completed history survey

courses completed the courses with a C or better and achieved mastery of history skills. When we raise the standard to 70 percent receiving a B or better twelve of seventeen categories meet the mark, with an overall average of 74 percent receiving a B or better, or more advanced mastery of critical skills of the historical discipline.

The number for B or better is lower in part because of the effect of online courses on overall pass rates. This was particularly the case for HI111 in the Summer 2015 semester and HI101 in the Spring 2016 semester. The percentage of students receiving a B or better for HI111 in Summer 2015 was 50 percent; 58 percent of students received a B or better in Spring 2016. Digging back into the raw data, five students failed HI111 in Summer 2015, both sections online, or 22 percent of the total students who completed the course. Six students failed HI101VA in Spring 2016, or 29 percent of students enrolled in the online course. Students in online courses often do not fully understand expectations of online courses and fall behind and miss deadlines. As a result, failure rates can be higher in online classes, distorting percentages for overall success of the remaining students.

Overall, the History Department is satisfied by what this data indicates about student mastery of critical history skills in survey courses taught on campus and online. The department has concerns about what this data may say about CEP courses.

As noted in the tables above, the percentage of students receiving a C or better or a B or better for CEP courses is significantly higher than campus courses; 88 percent compared to 96 percent received a C or better in HI111, 71/84 B or better. For HI112, the numbers are 82/99 and 73/86. In sum, it is nearly impossible not to pass a CEP course. This raises significant concerns about how comparable CEP courses are to campus courses, and, by extension, how prepared CEP students are for campus college courses anywhere they matriculate. Dr. Erby has worked with high school teachers who teach CEP courses in the last two years on completing the necessary rubrics for general education assessment. She has stressed that assessment, to be consistent with campus courses, must be based on written samples. She has regular conversations with CEP teachers about CEP/campus equivalency and essay writing. Some teachers may be more open to her counsel than others. The raw data indicate that the grade inflation problem is more pronounced for some instructors more than others. In aggregate, though, near universal pass rate for CEP courses and the quality concern that raises does a disservice to CEP students. For the purpose of assessment for this SLO, we cannot say that CEP students achieve mastery of the skills of the historical discipline.

Beyond assessment concerns, the History Department strongly suspects that growth in CEP numbers has undercut enrollments on campus. The disparity is apparent in the numbers reported on the grades spreadsheet submitted with this report. This disparity has been consistent for the last three years. We suspect that US survey courses are directly effected as students who take HI111 and/or HI112 as CEP courses do not take those courses as general education courses on campus.

Indirectly, high enrollments in HI111/112 as CEP courses could also depress enrollments in HI100/101/102. As students take three or six hours of history before they come to campus, it is less likely that they will take history for social science general education credit. Shrinking class size has meant cancelled classes. We now offer fewer sections of HI111/112 every semester. The other, greater problem is the potential reduction in majors. Because we recruit many of our majors in survey courses, fewer students in fewer sections means the potential for fewer majors.

We are aware that the university relies on CEP students as part of head count. However, we strongly contend that CEP as it exists at present presents the students, the History Department, and the University with significant challenges. While the History Department can work to address some of those challenges, it cannot solve the larger ones without active support from the College of Arts and Sciences and the University.

Results Sharing

The results of this report and associated data will be posted on the History Department website making them available students and community stakeholders, including alumni and auditors. Alumni and interested community members who receive the department newsletter will be informed through the newsletter that the report is available through the Department website. The results and all evidence will be reported directly to the University Assessment Committee. The report and associated data will also be emailed directly to faculty members for their review, as well as Tara Porter in Education. The results will also be discussed at the first department faculty meeting in fall 2016.

Course Embedded Assignment/Other Rubric

Faculty use the established rubric to assess a writing assignment completed by students towards the beginning of the semester and the end of the semester. The writing assignments are not identical from courses to course. Three questions in the rubric vary for HI111/112 and HI100/101/102 as the courses fulfill different general education SLOs. The remaining six questions on the rubric are the same. Those questions are:

1. Understands the disciplinary characteristics of history.
2. Comprehends the nature of primary sources.
3. Formulates historical questions.
4. Understands chronological sweep of material covered.
5. Comprehends major themes and issues in material.
6. Identifies significance of major figures in material.

The targets for each of those questions in the rubric are established in the rubrics already submitted, the critical and creative thinking rubric and the global diversity rubric.

The questions and the comparative nature of the data allow faculty means to assess more specifically whether or not students mastered the critical skills of the historical discipline. The summary data included in Sheet 2 of the 2015-2016 spreadsheets indicate quite clearly that students master those critical skills. Included in the data is the percentage of students who met target and advanced criteria for each question combined, the percentage of students who met developing criteria, and a comparison between the first assessment (pre) and the second assessment (post).

Averaging all courses together per question, the improvement was significant, ranging from a low of 16.17% (Understands chronological sweep of material covered) to 22.73% (Formulates historical questions). Digging into the data indicates more dramatic improvement in some courses on some questions. For examples, scores for "Formulations historical questions" improved 52.23% in HI111 in the Fall 2015 semester. Other courses noted more limited growth. HI102 noted 4.84% improvement in "Understands chronological sweep of material covered" in the Fall 2015 semester. Some courses noted small decreases in scores on some questions, a situation that may be attributable to higher "Not observed" responses for those courses, data not included in this summation. Overall, data within courses appears consistent, or within a similar range per course when looking at all questions as a whole. There is no data that raises any cause for concern. Instead the opposite is the case. The data suggest that using similar writing samples students enrolled in history classes mastered at least some of the skills of the historical discipline. This data is confirmed when compared to equally strong course grade results.

As of now this data does not include any information from CEP students, nor is it differentiated between online and face-to-face courses. Faculty regularly complete the rubrics for face-to-face courses, but only inconsistently do so for online courses. As such, this measure is best limited to understanding face-to-face courses.

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