

Assessment Report (2019)

Overview of Assessment Results

The centerpiece of the History Department's assessment of our undergraduate major continues to be based in our HIST 4990: History Capstone course. We employ a "backward design model" of assessment. In other words, we start with where we want our student to end, with the skills and abilities reflected in our Learning Outcomes (see History Department Assessment Page, "Learning Objectives"). Therefore, our assessment efforts center on answering the question, "How do we assure that students reach that endpoint?" HIST 4990 requires student to design, research and write a senior thesis; to pass the course, student must show mastery of each component of our Learning Outcomes, as expressed in the rubric for evaluating the thesis (See "Senior Capstone Rubric" on the History Department Assessment Page). Students also present their work at a HIST 4990 Conference, in which their projects are evaluated by other History Department faculty, to ensure interrater reliability (See "HIST 4990 Oral Presentation Data, 2015-2019" on the History Department Assessment Page). Finally, we also ask students to self-evaluate their experience in the major and their mastery of our Learning Outcomes (see "HIST 4990 Evaluation (SP19)" on the History Department Assessment Page).

In short, using our inter-reliability ratings from our faculty not teaching 4990, which we conducted at our Fall and Spring 4990 conferences, we see very positive outcomes for our students.

Outcomes (5 point scale)	Fall 2018 12 students	Spring 2019 16 students
Content Knowledge/Analysis	4.69	4.16
Organization	4.49	4.21
Communication	4.53	4.22

If we compare these scores to our master rubric of our desired outcomes, the students' averages fall into the range of "good mastery (4-4.5)" or "excellent mastery (4.5-5.0)".

This data is backed up by the student exit surveys (see "HIST 4990 Evaluation (SP19)" on the website for full surveys). With 10 student responses, 80 percent asserted the department was meeting its mission and they had acquired research, critical thinking, and writing skills. The remaining 20 percent did not answer the question (but did not respond that they had not learned these skills).

We also evaluate students at the beginning of their careers in our History major, in HIST 3000: History Research Methods. Indeed, creating HIST 3000 in 2015 was the Department's major reaction to our own Assessment efforts and identifying, with assessment data, areas we must improve. We measure students' incoming skillset in HIST 3000 and have them self-evaluate their progress and understanding of our Learning Objectives (see "HIST 3000 Reflections (F18)" and "HIST 3000 Surveys (F18)" on the History Department Assessment Page). The student surveys clearly reflect that we are succeeding making students aware of the skills they need to master to by HIST 4990, via their upper-division courses, to graduate with a History degree with the appropriate skills and knowledge.

Between these starting and end points, we have begun to assess individual classes and individual assignments, to ensure said assignments are actually meeting our Learning Objectives, across our curriculum, from survey level introductory classes to our graduate courses. The results of this effort are available as "Faculty Assignment Assessments 2017-18" on the History Department Assessment Page. We

also utilize rubrics at every level of our undergraduate curriculum, which can be found under “Tools for Assessment” on the History Department Assessment Page.

We have also begun a discussion of high-impact learning practices, and plan to begin to measure the extent of our employment of such classes across our curriculum. A survey in one Fall 2019 Department meeting suggested the vast majority of our classes already utilize at least one, if not several, of these practices.

Finally, we have begun to include many of our adjuncts in assessment for the first time, conducting peer evaluations of temporary faculty.

For our History Teaching Major, we have available an outside assessment tool, the Utah PRAXIS exam, which aspiring teachers must pass to earn their state accreditation. In 2018-2019, 81.2 percent of those taking the History exams passed and 83.3 percent of those taking the Social Studies exams passed. The History exam pass rate was higher than the state average (while, the Social Studies, over whose curriculum we have less control, had a slightly lower pass rate than the state average). (See “History Teaching Praxis Exam Data, 2019” on the History Department Assessment Page).

Finally, we use various *secondary* assessment tools. Utilizing our courses’ IDEA scores, with a focus on “Progress on Relevant Objectives” that align with our own Learning Outcomes, the Department can verify our direct assessment and determine if students self-evaluate that they are making progress on our Learning Outcomes. For Spring of 2019 (data taken from IDEA Group Summary Report, History, Utah State University, Spring 2019), our results were significantly better than the average for Utah State and the entire IDEA database.

	5 point scale – Averages by Unit		
	History	USU	IDEA
Objective 1 Gaining Factual Knowledge	4.4	4.3	4.0
Objective 2 Learning Fundamental Principles	4.4	4.3	3.9
Objective 8 Communication Skills	4.2	4.1	3.8
Objective 11 Analysis and Critical Evaluation	4.2	4.1	3.8
Objective 12 Interest in Pursuing Knowledge	4.1	4.1	3.8

Furthermore, in averaging all “Progress on Relevant Objectives,” 64 percent of our responses fell into the Much Higher or Higher category, while IDEA would expect only 30 percent of the responses to fall into this category. This data shows that our students think they are reaching the desired outcomes in our courses.

We also use employment data to assess our major (see “Employment Data,” on the History Department Assessment Page). Finally, we rely on External Reviews of our Department, such as the Regents Review of April 2018, the result of which can be found under “External Measures and Reports” on the History Department Assessment Page).

The History Department is continually striving to improve our assessment. The rest of this report details our specific new initiatives over the past few years.

1. Creation and Development of a Sophomore-Level Methods Course (2013-2019 project)

A. **Identifying the Concern.** In 2013, faculty, librarians, and students reported problems with students being underprepared for their HIST 4990 research capstone course. As a result, the department surveyed HIST 4990 instructors and students and instituted a shared rubric to assess skills against our learning outcomes. After a discussion at the 2014 retreat, the department voted to create a sophomore-level methods course (HIST 3000), which is a model that is embraced by many history departments in the United States.

B. **Creating HIST 3000** – new course created in spring 2015

C. **Assessing HIST 3000**

Multiple assessment tools used to gauge success of course

--exit surveys from 2015-16

--written reflections from students and professor in spring 2017

--discussion among faculty at 2017 retreat

--students who have completed HIST 3000 helped write the HIST 4990 Senior Capstone syllabus in Fall 2017 and will write a reflection in December 2017

D. **Initial Conclusions**

- IDEA scores – average to above average marks on “Progress on Relevant Objectives”
- Student exit surveys report improved knowledge of library and research skills, but they suggest that more fine-tuning of the historical process parts of the class may need to feature in future sections.
- Librarians and HIST 4990 instructors report better Historical Skills than in the past
- Spring 2017 written reflections show that students report more confidence in historical research and analysis
- Oral assessment shows marked improvement in student performance over three years

E. **Still to be completed--**

- Department head 3-year review of IDEA forms and enrollment figures (2018-19)
- Meeting of HIST 3000 and HIST 4990 instructors to discuss success of new methods courses in meeting History Learning Outcomes
- Norm Jones is authoring an article for a peer-reviewed journal about his assessment projects in HIST 3000

2. Internships and Public History (2014-19 project)

A. **Identifying the Concern.** Faculty who have been watching the career paths of students in history identified a problem with our internship procedures and placements. Students also complained that it was difficult to find internships and to receive help with the process. Also, increasingly history departments across the country have been creating public history tracks or programs to better prepare students for a variety of careers.

B. Reviewing and Revising internship procedures

The department commissioned a faculty member to create a report on peer institutions and public history programs. After that report in 2015, the department met to discuss possibilities to improve access to internships and public history skills for students. First, the department hired a coordinator for a two-year project to improve communication and access to internships (completed 2017). Second, the department hired a Public Historian, who began work in Fall 2017.

In 2018-2019, six students completed internships at Hill Air Force Base, Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, a USU Teaching Internship, and the *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies* (3 interns).

C. Creating a Public History Track and a Permanent Internship Coordinator (2017-19)

Our new Public Historian, Rebecca Andersen, taught our first public history methods course for graduate students and undergraduates in spring 2018. She has also begun meeting with students and internship providers to better facilitate student internships. Dr. Andersen presented a new public history track for master's students in history, which was approved at a 2017 department meeting. Finally, the department will pilot 2-credit 7-week long public history skills courses in 2018-19 to support our new public history track.

D. Initial assessment of Public History Program (scheduled for 2019-2020)

3. Tracking the use of High-Impact Learning practices across the curriculum

While an informal survey reveals almost all of our classes employ high-impact learning practices, we will begin to track which practices are employed in which classes.

4. Discussion of the Pre-Major

Data from student surveys and CIVITAS suggests our pre-major is not working as intended and perhaps suppressing enrollment. An initial department meeting addressed this in spring of 2019. Further action will be taken in summer of 2019.