University of Rhode Island

LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT PLAN, DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

The undergraduate program in History is taught in three different formats: 100, 300 and 400 level courses. Primarily for freshmen and sophomores, 100 level courses serve a university-wide clientele seeking to earn credits for Letters and General Education requirements as well as potential history majors. Primarily for juniors and seniors, 300 level courses offer more detailed information and historical concepts in particular subjects. They are completed by students earning a BA in history, but can also be part of other disciplinary programs (e.g., Film Studies, International Relations, Women's Studies, and African and African-American Studies.) The capstone sequence, taught at the 400 level, is for history and education majors who are typically in their junior or senior years. These guidelines are designed, therefore, with all of these particular audiences in mind, with the assumption that general education students, majors in other disciplines, and history and education degree candidates will benefit from learning how to think, write and speak as historians in the making.

Students in history courses will begin to develop at the 100 level and then perfect at the 300 and 400 level their "historical understanding," made up of the following elements:

- Periodization: how change occurs over time and how events create historical causation.
- Geography: how societies are influenced by their geographical location, natural resources, and physical relationship to other parts of the world
- Ideas: how philosophical, political, scientific and religious ideas have influenced the past.
- Diversity: how race, gender, class, ethnicity, and religion create "histories" rather than a monolithic past.
- Factual: how people, places, spatial relationships and events create historical change.

Students will develop the following skills as they progress toward graduation:

- Understanding the distinction between primary and secondary sources
- Reading primary and secondary sources in a critical way
- Comparing and contrasting historical interpretations (historiography)
- Constructing and communicating historical arguments in both oral and written form
- Demonstrating factual understanding
- Demonstrating conceptual understanding

In 100 and 300 level history classes:

Students will improve their mastery of the following abilities in oral presentations, papers, exams and group assignments:

- question the limits of the sources' framing of historical questions
- identify biases of the authors of sources.
- write clear well-formed sentences and paragraphs
- analyze primary and/or secondary sources
- frame and answer historical questions
- analyze the context in which the sources were created
- extract information relevant to the assignment
- quote the sources accurately and effectively
- follow scholarly conventions in citations as appropriate

In the 400 level history sequence:

Students will study historians' accounts of a thematic topic, locate primary sources, prepare a research paper précis, and prepare two drafts of a research paper. They will incorporate the following skills:

- identification of a meaningful historical question
- knowledge of historical context
- appropriate use of primary sources
- understanding and interpretation of secondary sources (historiography related to a particular theme)
- construction of an effective argument in support of a thesis
- effective writing
- appropriate documentation of sources

Level of Student Performance

By the time of graduation as a history major, 75% of students will exhibit good to excellent mastery of the elements required in the 400 level sequence.

The following methods may be used to assess student progress at all levels:

- Oral reports
- Small group discussion of primary documents and/or secondary sources
- Examinations, including essay and objective test formats
- Paper assignments that incorporate elements of "historical understanding" (see above).
- Pre-course and post-course student surveys
- SETs that include discipline specific questions
- Portfolio collection of précis and research papers produced in the 400 level capstone sequence in the History department

Department governance of assessment and outreach to students will include:

- Attachment of "historical understanding" elements and skills to be mastered to course syllabi.
- Collection in History department of course syllabi and sample assignments
- Dissemination of goals/assessment guidelines to part-time, CCE, and new faculty
- Faculty self-assessment
- Periodic review of guidelines and syllabi by a department Assessment committee
- Discussion of possible changes within department as a while as a result of evaluation