

Illinois State University
Department of History
MEMORANDUM
Assessment Report, 2003-04

To: John Freed, Chair, and DFSC
From: Ross Kennedy, Assessment Coordinator
Regarding: Student Outcomes Assessment
Date: 1 February 2005

Attached are the results of the “student learning outcomes assessment” for the last academic year, 2003-04. These results are part of an on-going assessment project mandated by the IBHE. A copy of this report will be submitted to the University Assessment Office.

This is the second year we have gathered results for the Department’s assessment project, the first being 2002-03. After a third year, we should have accumulated enough material to assist us in guiding our curriculum in a more systematic way. I would recommend that following the writing of the third year report, for the academic year 2004-05, the Curriculum Committee, the Chair, the DFSC, and the Assessment Coordinator meet to discuss the findings of the project with the aim of integrating them into our curriculum development efforts.

1. PROCEDURE

The procedure followed for gathering data for the 2003-04 academic year was the same as that followed for 2002-03. I collected computer discs containing electronic copies of HIS 200 and HIS 300 papers from both fall and spring semesters. The HIS 300 discs also contained student assessments of their experiences as majors in the History Department. Most sections turned in the discs as requested. All told, I netted 92 usable papers for HIS 300 and 71 for HIS 200, roughly the same totals as received in 2002-03. I then randomly selected about 25% of the papers for evaluation – 18 for HIS 200, 24 for HIS 300.

I evaluated the papers using the same rubric developed by Alan Lessoff for the 2002-03 sample (*see the details on the rubric in Alan’s report on the 2002-03 sample*, dated May 29, 2003). In brief, a 6 point scale was used for three categories, “knowledge,” “research/analysis,” and “communication.” A score of 6 indicated a high level of skill, 5—good, 4—acceptable, 3--borderline acceptable, 2—inadequate, 1—failure.

2. RESULTS

Attached are tables summing up the results from the sample using the 1-6 scale. They are similar to the results found in the 2002-03 report, although the improvement observed between HIS 200 and HIS 300 scores fell off slightly. This may be because of minor differences in interpreting and applying the rubric between Alan and I. It should be remembered too that the rubric cannot capture the overall impression one gets from reading through the entire sample.

Attachments:

[HIS 200 03-04](#)

[HIS 300 03-04](#)

My sense was that the HIS 300 papers did show more improvement over HIS 200 than the numerical results indicated. The improvement, however, was not as striking as one would hope. Students in HIS 300 showed more awareness of historiography than the HIS 200 students, but they still had trouble reading secondary sources critically. When HIS 300 students used primary sources, they did engage them more thoroughly than HIS 200 students. Unfortunately, however, too many papers did not make extensive use of primary sources.

One reason for these results may be the unevenness in the design of HIS 300 courses across different sections. As Alan suggested last year, appointing “captains” for HIS and HIS 300 may be a way to bring greater uniformity to the sections to insure that they fulfill the Department’s objectives. The Department, however, is seriously understaffed at the moment, so that solution may have to wait until the University allows us to fill some or all of our vacant lines.

With another assessment report in hand next year, we will have more data to work with and a better sense of where we stand on staffing. We will then be better able to assess how to interpret and respond to the results of our assessment project.

3. “INDIRECT” ASSESSMENTS

We have two measurements of how students themselves have perceived their accomplishments and experiences as history majors at ISU. One is the result of an alumni survey conducted in 2004 by the University Assessment Office. Unfortunately, only 27 history alumni participated in the survey, making the results less useful than one would like. Still, the results do show a high level of satisfaction with the program.

We have more extensive data from the 400-1000 word “self-assessments” turned in with HIS 300 papers. I read about 60 self-assessments from the 2003-04 year, from seven sections of HIS 300. Students had very positive comments about the program. Significantly, they consistently praised how their history courses taught them to think in a more analytical manner, improved their writing skills, and led them to understand the meaning of historical interpretation. From the students’ point of view, we certainly met our program goals. Students also were impressed by the faculty’s knowledge and accessibility. Students found the Department’s advisors extremely helpful as well. As was the case in Alan’s sample last year, they tended to like HIS 300 more than HIS 200.

I found the “self-assessments” interesting and useful. They indicate to me that students find our program challenging and one that more than met their expectations.