

## **History Department Graduate Academic Assessment Plan**

*Revision: November 2012*

### **Program Goals for M.A./M.S. History**

The department seeks to prepare graduate students, regardless of their career paths, to be informed and dedicated citizens so that they may participate fully in the civic life of the communities in which they live. We seek to develop students' historical knowledge and thinking, engage them in the practice of historical research, familiarize them with the current contours of the historiography in the various fields of history taught by the faculty, and hone their critical thinking and writing skills.

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

Graduating master's degree students will be able to:

1. Display knowledge of vital themes and narratives in history at an advanced level of sophistication. This involves the ability to discuss diverse time periods, peoples, situations, and societies, as well as identify, describe, and apply relevant historical information and details.
2. Display historical thinking and engage in historical analysis at an advanced level of sophistication. This involves the ability to perceive past events and issues as they were experienced by the people at the time; to comprehend the interplay of change and continuity; to grasp the complexity of historical causation; to appreciate the tentative nature of judgments about the past; and to recognize the difference between fact and conjecture; and to read evidence and arguments critically in order to draw conclusions about the past.
3. Conduct original historical research with the potential for publication. This involves the ability to construct historiographically significant research questions; to apply a research methodology and design appropriate to the subject matter; to find and analyze primary source evidence; and to construct an interpretation that answers the questions posed in the project.
4. Display advanced knowledge of the historiography of general topic areas, such as, for example, "late modern Europe." This involves identifying and understanding the lines of debate within the historiography of a topic, and, when appropriate, situating original research in the context of historiographical debate.
5. Communicate historical knowledge and explanations to other people with an advanced level of sophistication. This involves the ability to present a historical interpretation in a well-organized and logical manner; to follow proper rules of grammar and syntax; and to convey the interpretation in prose that engages the reader.

## Assessment Procedure

### 1. Measures: Direct Assessment

Students in the graduate program complete one of two tracks to complete their degrees: the “Field of Study” option or the “Thesis” option. Students in both tracks are expected to achieve the learning outcomes listed above, albeit through different courses of study. To assess as wide a sample of students as possible, we have developed two forms of direct assessment that represent the various requirements of both program options and that will allow us to measure student knowledge and skills at the beginning of the program and on completion of the program. *Measure One* will focus on measuring historiographic knowledge, along with content knowledge, historical thinking, and writing skills. *Measure Two* will allow us to measure original research skills, as well as the other outcomes listed.

**Measure One Data:** (1) In history courses at the 400 level, graduate students are often required to produce seminar papers that entail historiographic analysis. (2) Students who opt not to write a thesis are required to take HIS 490, “Field of Study,” the semester before they graduate, in which they work closely with a faculty member to master the historiography in a particular field. They then take an exam to demonstrate their mastery of this field.

**Measure Two Data:** (1) History 497 is a required course for students not writing a thesis, usually taken in their second semester of study. In this course, students produce a major paper that is based in original primary research and that engages secondary sources in a historiographic manner. (2) Graduate students who opt to complete their degree with a master’s thesis are required to produce a work of original scholarship of around 80-100 pages based on primary and secondary sources.

### Uses of the Information

**Measure One:** The Assessment Coordinator collects a sample of graduate seminar papers from students *in their first semester of study* and a sample of Field of Study exams from students *in their last semester of study* over a two-year period. The coordinator evaluates the papers and exams in four categories to measure performance in the Student Learning Outcomes listed above:

- Knowledge (outcome 1)
- Analysis (outcome 2)
- Historiography (outcome 4)
- Writing (outcome 5)

**Measure Two:** The Assessment Coordinator also collects a sample of papers from History 497, as well as master theses from produced over the same two-year period. The coordinator evaluates these papers and theses in five categories to measure performance in the Student Learning Outcomes listed above:

- Knowledge (outcome 1)
- Analysis (outcome 2)
- Research (outcome 3)
- Historiography (outcome 4)
- Writing (outcome 5)

Every other year, the coordinator reports the results of this data to the Chair, the DFSC, and the Graduate Committee. The report includes recommendations for action to improve the department's performance in achieving its desired student learning outcomes. Faculty then discusses any findings in the report and deliberates as to what actions to take, if any, to improve curriculum, instruction, and learning.

## 2. Measures: Indirect Assessment

Upon completion of their degree, students are asked to complete an exit questionnaire, administered by the graduate director. They are asked:

What did you hope to achieve by doing a Master's Degree in History at ISU?

What did you accomplish, or fail to accomplish, and why during your time in the program?

Which academic experiences, positive or negative, contributed most to your history education here at ISU?

How well have you developed intellectually in the program?

What do you consider the biggest strengths of the graduate program in history at ISU?

What do you consider the biggest weaknesses of the program?

Note: The Assessment Coordinator also reviews the results of the University Assessment Office's Alumni Survey, when available.

## Uses of the Information

The assessment coordinator reviews the data generated from the exit questionnaire biennially and summarizes it in a report to the Chair, the DFSC, and the Graduate Committee. This data is discussed alongside the findings from the direct assessment measures at faculty meetings and is part of the deliberations over what actions to take, if any, to improve curriculum, instruction, and learning.