

UW Colleges Assessment Planning and Reporting Form

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2003 - 2004

Department	History
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NOTE: Please attach relevant supporting information used to complete the Report Summary Sheet.

PART 1: Assessment of General Education Outcomes

Section 1: Identify the Proficiencies and Performance Indicators Assessed

- at the *Planning* stage, mark the performance indicators to be assessed in the left hand column below
- at the *Reporting* stage, report the numbers of students who did not meet, met, or exceeded expectations

Proficiency	Performance Indicators	# Do Not Meet	# Meet	# Exceed
A. Analytical Skills	1. Analyze, synthesize, evaluate and interpret information and ideas	237	608	334
	2. Construct and support hypotheses and arguments			
	3. Select and apply scientific and other appropriate methodologies			
	4. Integrate knowledge and experience to arrive at creative solutions			
	5. Recognize fallacies and inconsistencies			
	6. Gather and assess information from printed sources, electronic sources, and observation			

Section 3: Use of Results

1. How did individual instructors report that they plan to use these results to improve the instructional process?

Individual instructors made a number of positive comments on the assessment process and results. This year was the first that the history department had a clearly delineated and common assessment project, focused on the analysis and interpretation of primary documents, and this spring we introduced a common assessment tool, a worksheet designed to aid students in the process of analyzing and interpreting the source. Many of the instructors reported that their student's ability to analyze and interpret the documents improved throughout the semester, and in the end the project was a success.

I had the class read three short documents relevant to the beginning of the Cold War—one a speech by Churchill, one a letter from Stalin, and one a speech by Truman before Congress. They were to analyze the documents to try to discover the origins and intensification of hostilities between the western democracies and the USSR in 1946 and 47. I was very pleased with their efforts. We did quite a few of these exercises during the semester, concentrating on the meaning of analyze, synthesize, evaluate and interpret, and the effort seems to have paid off. Many more students exceeded expectations than I thought would do so. It also showed in their exam essays that they had a better idea of how to break something apart to find out what it meant, and to draw conclusions from the information.

Last spring, I kind of surprised them with the assessment; this term I concentrated more heavily on the tools needed to analyze something all semester

Overall, the assessment went smoothly. Although the students had not used the form before, most of them had little problem adjusting to it. As the results show, some showed considerable skill at not simply analyzing the document but drawing conclusions about the world described in Genesis. Most fell short of that, but still showed analytical skills. A few were simply able to find facts but failed to draw conclusions.

After reviewing the assessment, we have decided to do some things differently in the Fall. While most students understood the form, there were a few who did have some trouble with it. In their case, the assessment tool may not have functioned accurately. Therefore, we intend to expand these analysis assignments and have them do two or three times during the semester. We will also weight the assignment a bit more.

Also we will use a different primary source than Genesis for the assessment (though we still plan to have them do a document analysis of it). The range of religious belief in class is wide, and some of the questions on the sheet could be very different depending upon one's religion. We anticipated that and, we think, compensated for it adequately, but it might be better just to avoid the problem, at least until we are all more fluent with assessment of analysis

When I assessed my HIS 278 students, it was the third time this semester that they had been required to fill out one of these Document Analysis Worksheets. My personal results were pretty good. Of those present at the time of the in-class assessment, 25% exceeded expectations, 54% met expectations, and only 21% failed to meet expectations. I find these relatively encouraging even though this is a sophomore-level course and even though they had used the worksheet before.

I think that I might have had even higher results if I had allowed students all the time they wanted to finish the exercise. The document in question was an assigned reading for the course, but naturally not everyone had come prepared to class (meaning not everyone had read the document in advance). I only gave the students 20 minutes to fill out the analysis worksheet. That was ample for those who had read it, and adequate for those who read relatively fast. But it was not adequate for those with weaker reading skills, who typically made one of two errors: (1) they misinterpreted what they read because they tried to read it too quickly; or (2) they didn't finish filling out the form. I would be willing to bet money that all 5 who failed the analysis had not read the document before coming to class.

The question posed on the report you need to do, asks "How did individual instructors report that they plan to use these results to improve the instructional process?" Given my interpretation of the results, and if I wanted to use the same document, which was not easy or quick to read, the only thing I could think of to improve student performance would be to warn students up to a week in advance and then repeatedly that they would be required to do an in-class writing on one of the documents assigned for that particular day and that they had better make sure to read those documents before coming to class in order to do their best. Since I normally have a policy of not warning students in advance about in-class writings, I would be reluctant to take that approach. Another way I might improve student performance would be to use a document that is easier and quicker to read or to give the students longer to fill out the worksheet. I will do one of these next spring, but I'm not entirely sure which right now.

I am currently using this year's assessment results to improve my instruction in my summer course. Essentially, I believe that the assessment exercise itself prompted students to offer more thoughtful analyses of a primary source than the norm in my classes. As a result, I have actually introduced our assessment tool (the document analysis worksheet) on the first day of class. I then proceeded through an analysis of the 14th amendment to the U.S. Constitution using that assessment tool in the course of my first lecture. Toward the end of the lecture I had students break into small groups and analyze a brief passage from a Civil War diary. I then prompted students to apply the questions on the document analysis worksheet toward each of the primary sources assigned as outside reading for the remainder of the course. While have no formal measure to gauge the effect of this approach on students' analytical abilities, I have noted a general improvement in the quality of discussion

of primary source readings in class. In particular, students have been attentive to and critical of sources' authors, audiences, and original purposes.

In reading the exercise, it confirmed what I largely know. Many good students take online courses. They already possess the skills of analyzing course materials. Since this had to be a take home assignment (all must be), in the future, I will not give students so long to fill out the form. I will give them one week rather than one month.

Please note that online courses require advance notice to integrate materials into the course. For example, I submitted my current course on September 10, 2001. I have yet to update the course to take that and subsequent events into account. As a result, it was difficult to get this class engaged in the Assessment exercise. Even though students were repeatedly reminded (and rewarded) for doing the exercise, many good students did not even turn the form in.

2. What recommendations would you and/or the department assessment committee make to your department for continued improvement of the assessment process, proficiencies, performance indicators, assessment activity, rubric, and/or student performance in the discipline?

From what the instructors reported it seems that the assessment project worked best and had the best results when it was integrated as fully as possible into the day to day routine of the course. Instructors who made it a point to introduce the assessment tool early in the semester and continually use the tool throughout the semester reported the best results in students increasing in their ability to analyze and interpret the documents presented. Instructors also found that the more consistently they referred to and used the assessment tool, the better students were able to write answers to essay exam questions, and obvious outgrowth from their increased ability to analyze and interpret information.

3. After discussion of the results by the department, what course of action will the department take to improve student performance with respect to the assessed proficiency?

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At the Fall department meeting, faculty and IAS discussed the possibility of doing more teaching about what analysis is from the beginning of each semester, and using the document analysis tool more frequently in order to instill the principles of analysis in the students' minds. Since the department has stated that the ability to analyze primary documents is a necessary proficiency for students of history courses, and since that proficiency fits so well with the general assessment task, it was agreed that deliberate teaching of the principles of analysis as well as active analysis on their part will help our students gain this proficiency. Department members will continue assessing this proficiency even when other proficiencies are introduced in the assessment cycle.

The new proficiency to be assessed, Communication, will be easy for the department, in the opinion of its members. Communicating clearly and precisely in a well-organized manner is the heart of teaching and writing about history. The department in general uses essay writing of all kinds—in-class essays, short analytical essays, and research papers to give students the chance to demonstrate their understanding of the subjects taught. Each instructor has extensive experience in assessing the quality and “communicativeness” and clarity of exercises of this kind.

PART 2: Assessment of Department-Specific Outcomes

Section 1: Identify department-specific outcomes/performance indicators.

Outcomes/Performance Indicators
1. <i>After taking any course in the History Department a student will be able to analyze and interpret primary documents and distinguish between primary and secondary documents.</i>

Section 2: Attach the rubric/standards used to assess each outcome/performance indicator.

Exceeds Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyzes information and ideas very well May draw conclusions and examine implications Consistently distinguishes between primary and secondary documents
Meets Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyzes information and ideas adequately May draw conclusions Generally distinguishes between primary and secondary documents
Fails to Meet Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fails to analyze information and ideas consistently May fail to draw conclusions Fails to distinguish between primary and secondary documents

Section 3: Assessment Results

PLEASE NOTE: This year the history department-specific outcome was closely aligned with the General Education Outcome. While the department did develop a department-specific rubric, the department members chose not to report department-specific outcomes separate from the general education outcomes. This coming year, as the general education outcomes move to the assessment of communication skills, the department-specific outcome will come more into play, to wit, the continued assessment of student's ability to analyze and interpret primary documents, and be able to consistently distinguish between primary and secondary sources.

PART 3: Additional Assessment and Contributions

Please ask for and include in the report information from Department members about any other assessment activities they have conducted, particularly in conjunction with grant-funded innovations. Also ask for and describe briefly any additional contributions to assessment such as publications, presentations, qualitative classroom innovations (such as Scholarship of Teaching and Learning activities), and other items relating to assessment that the department wishes to note.

Members of the history department continue to be involved in a wide variety of activities that work to strengthen the assessment program in the UW Colleges. Beyond the formal assessment activities described in this report, members of the department also engage in on-going assessments of a variety of skills pertinent to student's success. Among those are map and photo reading exercises, analysis of charts and graphs, and a wide variety of writing assignments that continually give instructors feed-back on how they are doing in meeting the needs of our students. Some members of the department are also engaged in S.O.T.L. projects ranging from short-term inquires aimed at improving a particular course or set of courses, to more long-range, longitudinal research looking

into the benefits of learning community courses, to name a few. One member of the department is going to present some of his on-going research at the AAC&U's Network for Academic Renewal conference ***Educating Intentional Learners: New Connections for Academic and Student Affairs*** in Philadelphia this coming November. All in all, the history department is well on the way to further integrating assessment into our day-to-day practices, and helping to develop a strong culture of assessment in the UW Colleges.

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One department member, a UW Colleges teaching Scholar, has reported on her research into the teaching of History 127, *The World in the Twentieth Century*. Choosing as the primary learning goal "having students understand that the present is rooted in the past," she developed strategies to keep the students learning from the start of the class to the finish—being especially careful to define terms and historical categories, as well as surveying the students about what they wanted to learn about the modern world. She assessed progress often by using the Student Assessment of Learning Gains available from the UW System. Though satisfied with the progress her students made, she will continue to collect data and continue using her new strategies in order to ascertain whether the changes she made led to student improvement, or were these students "unusually engaged and interested" from the beginning.

At its Fall meeting, the History Department formed a new sub-committee that will examine the department course offerings, issues of course numbering, enrollment caps and prerequisites. The results of course assessment and various SOTL projects will inform any decisions the department makes. The department is particularly interested in "closing the loop" on assessment and feels that this examination will effectively use the results of its assessment activities and research to improve its members' teaching and its students' learning.