HISTORY DEPARTMENT ASSESSMENT REPORT OF PROGRAM
GOALS

Fall, 2006

I. Assessment of Student Learning in the Major

1. Goals for Student Learning
   a. Provide a list of the core or essential student learning goals for
      graduating majors in your program(s), even if these learning objectives
      have not changed in the last year.

      1. Demonstrate basic mastery of a significant body of
         historical knowledge
      2. Write persuasively using evidence to support the
         argument following the Chicago Manual of Style
      3. Use a variety of historical sources in scholarship,
         including primary sources; students will understand
         how to use archival sources, secondary literature
         electronic databases and other kinds of historical
         materials.
      4. Understand the important conceptual and
         historiographical issues in the theory and practice of
         history; and have an appreciation for the degree to
         which facts are interpreted
      5. Write and present original research of a quality
         similar to undergraduates at peer institutions. This
         last item embodies all the skills of items 1-4.

   b. Indicate the goal(s) that you decided, as a program, to pursue through
      this assessment cycle (the past year). Include performance indicators
      and rubrics used to describe student achievement of the goals(s).

      1. The primary goal was that 50% of students achieve
         competence and 20% achieve distinction in goal 5
         noted above. The dept had set competence goals for
         all of the learning objectives scaled according to their
         degree of difficulty. For example, our goal is that
         90% of our students master item two (to write
         persuasively and to support argument following the
         Chicago Manual of style) and that 90% master goal
         one (master a significant body of historical
         knowledge). Our objective is for 50% competence in
goal five because that very difficult task embodies
and integrates all the other goals.

2. The mechanism for the assessment of this goal was
the senior capstone seminar in which students write a
lengthy research paper (item 1.5.)

3. The Faculty instructor for this course grades this
paper using as a rubric the departments learning
objectives.

4. Only five students took the course last year, the last
year it was optional (it was not in the catalog or
required for the major when these students entered
Pacific). They surpassed department expectations in
their achievements with three out of the five
achieving distinction and the remaining achieving
competence. However, we recognize that since the
course was not required, students participating were a
self selected group. This year, 2006-7 is the first year
that the capstone class is compulsory for all
graduating seniors.

c. Explain briefly why you decided to pursue the goal(s) and describe how
the decision was reached.

The decision was reached several years ago to initiate a capstone
research seminar for our majors. That decision was implemented
immediately and the course has now been taught 4 times. The long term
plan is that, while the capstone provided a useful assessment tool for
student achievement in relation to the department’s goals, it needed to
be set alongside a historical methods course, which we would require
for sophomores (when most of our majors declare), to provide starting
data so we could track change over time and calculate measurable
outcomes in student learning.

The implementation of the sophomore component of the assessment
plan was delayed due to a lack of faculty resources. With the retirement
of one faculty member and the hiring of another with room in her
schedule and an ability to teach a course in historical methods, such a
course will be taught for the first time in Spring 2007.

The goal that 50% of students would be able to complete this project
with competence seemed realistic in terms of the difficulty of the task
we are requiring of students. We were pleased when our students vastly
exceeded that goal, even recognizing that this was not all seniors in the
major.
2. Gathering evidence
a. Describe the kind(s) and amount of evidence you gathered. Indicate the method used or approach taken, the settings in which they were generated, and what students they were gathered from (seniors, a capstone course, etc).

The setting is the capstone class and the evidence is the variety of work they produce for the class. Although the final product is a research paper, there are several stages before that – outlines, prospectuses, drafts, that allow the instructor to see with what kinds of skills the students had entered the class. Each of these allows the instructor to measure competence against a rubric of the department’s goals.

b. Explain briefly the rationale for this method, that is, why you thought this kind of evidence would answer your questions about student achievement of the goal(s).

The rationale is that writing and the ability to interpret and synthesize information are the core testament of the historian’s craft. There is no set body of historical knowledge that people should have. It is impossible for anyone to know everything. The real skill to be imparted is for students to be able to interpret historical evidence for themselves. Each of the assessment steps noted above allow the instructor to gauge the student’s skills. This is done for its own sake and so that the instructor can intervene and find any gaps in the skill set before the final project is due. Of course, now the historical methods course is in place, students should come to the capstone class more fully prepared than they have been.

3. Interpretation
a. Describe the process you used to examine the evidence collected.

Capstone instructor and student faculty advisors receive copies of the student’s work in the capstone. There is therefore a full opportunity for the review of students work by more than one faculty member. There is then a full meeting of the department to discuss the achievements of the students.

b. What did you learn about the strengths and weaknesses of your students, or of the particular group you focused on (for example, graduating majors)? How many of your students (at what level, if not graduating majors) are achieving the goal(s)?
Over the four years that this has been ongoing, the department became acutely aware that students had uneven levels of preparation, especially those who had transferred from other institutions. This lack of preparation was not in general historical knowledge but in skills. Faculty had moved at different speeds through skill development materials in their classes. Thus, the department became aware of the imperative of requiring a historical methods class rather than each faculty member trying to teach historical methods tangentially in his or her courses on other subjects. This need could not be filled until the retirement of William Brennan, when his line would be filled by someone who had a track record of teaching a methods class.

c. What is the distribution of student performance along the spectrum from low to high proficiency?

Students had generally done better than we expected but we realized the group we were studying was a self selected group.

d. Did your findings meet your expectations for level of proficiency? How or how not?

Students have exceeded our expectations, however, the sample was small.

4. Use for improvement
   a. List identified improvements you plan to make, based on your results.

The department is aware of the urgent need to have the sophomore class in place and is glad that it has the personnel to implement that addition this year. Additionally, the department felt that with the small group of majors currently moving through the program, the department could complete the assessment rubric in a committee as a whole. With such a meeting, faculty advisors can offer additional perspective on student progress.

   b. How will you implement such improvements? For example, will there be changes in program requirements, course content, teaching methods?

The department has already decided on appropriate meeting times to bring about such an analysis of the data.

   c. What level of support will be required?

None – only occasional food!

II. Assessing the Assessment Cycle
1. What worked well for you in this assessment cycle? What insights can you share about the assessment approach used?

We have learned that assessment is a work in progress, constantly in need of refining and adjustment as the department faculty and students change and as we become more sophisticated about developing what is best practice for the discipline.

2. In what ways, if any, is the present approach to assessment different from the process you followed before?

The department had never offered a capstone or been able to implement a historical methods class before. Doing so required a significant reallocation of resources and a new generation of faculty eager to embrace change. With both these classes in place now, the department looks forward to collecting more thorough longitudinal data on our program.