

General Education Assessment 2013-2014 Results for Interpreting the Past

Background

In 2012-2013 the history department sampled a variety of its general education courses (History 101-105) to confirm the existence of assignments, lectures, discussions, and readings that encourage students to accomplish the following goals listed below, which are identified as objectives in the “Interpreting the Past” section of “Ways of Knowing” in the General Education requirement.

- A. Students will assess the strengths and weaknesses of historical methodologies.*
- B. Students will identify, explain, and use historical concepts and terms.*
- C. Students will hypothesize causal relationships in history such as economic, social, intellectual, political, and cultural issues.*
- D. Students will construct a critical chronology of the subject.*
- E. Students will identify basic elements of the relevant geography.*
- F. Students will make effectively logical and coherent arguments based upon factual evidence*

Many of our assignments attempt to accomplish these goals. For example, Professor Timothy Orr in History 104H in the fall semester of 2010 collected student papers in response to several works of historical scholarship: “First, each student must concisely and accurately explain the book’s central argument. Second, each student must summarize the evidence utilized by the author. Third, each student must offer an analytical critique of the book. (This means critiquing the scholarship, not the author’s writing style).” Such an assignment addresses all of the first three issues above. Similarly, an objective of Professor Chandra de Silva in History 105H is for students to develop an “understanding of the nature of History.” He continues, “How can we hypothesize causal relationships and construct critical chronologies?” Along the same lines, Professor Kathy Pearson in History 102H tests the students on the contents of five supplementary books, asking among other things: “What are the basic assumptions of the author or artist?” Adjunct instructor Genna M. Swartz asks students to examine primary source documents, analyze them, and “consider [them] within [their] historical context.” She asks: “What issues does the document address and how does it fit within its historical context? When and where was it written? Why is it significant?”

All of our survey courses pay close attention to both chronology and geography, and all of the assignments of the history department demand “logical and coherent arguments based upon factual evidence.” Professor Orr’s 104, for example, surveys “the significant events, personalities, and changes that occurred between the colonial period and the present day.”

Methodology

For 2013-2014 the History department required that every survey course exhibit competency in all of the above topics. Each course had assignments that addressed one or several of the rubric outcomes, and each instructor designated one of the assignments for evaluation from a faculty team assembled by the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment. In order to collect the assignments, the instructor had the students upload the document to blackboard as an electronic file which was accessible to the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, and collected a hard copy for comments and exchange with the instructor. The department created a grading rubric to guide the team in the evaluation of the assignment.

Table 1. Interpreting the Past Rubric

	Exceeds expectations	Meets expectations	Approaches expectations	Nonexistent
Concepts, causal relationships, chronology, logic and coherence	Strong grasp of issue; logical presentation of ideas, with attention to transitions and overall purpose; well-supported; imaginative and creative connections which support thesis; awareness of alternative views on topic	Clear argument; well-supported by documentary evidence; attempt to address alternative arguments	Absence of argument; simplistic view of topic; no effort to grasp alternative arguments; occasional insightful interpretations	Incoherent; poorly supported; disorganized
Chronology	Effective use of chronology to develop and support argument	Awareness of chronological dimension to topic	Little attention to relationship of chronology to topic	Total lack of attention to significance of change over time
Geography	Persuasive and convincing attention to geographical dimensions of topic	Effective use of geography to illustrate and explore topic	Inadequate attention to geography	Oblivious to geographic dimensions of topic
Historiography	Strong understanding of different interpretations of topic; convincing presentation of own views with reference to previous work	Awareness of different trends and interpretations in historiography	Inadequate awareness of historiography	Unaware of relevant historiographic traditions

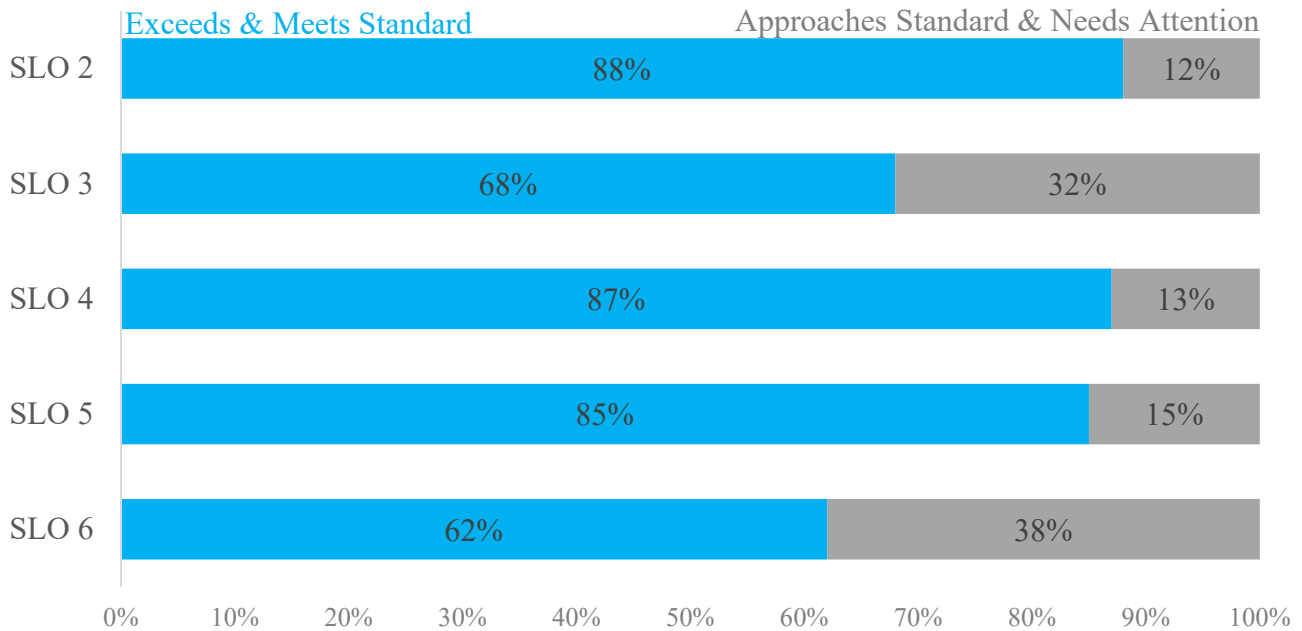
A two-day assessment summit was convened in May 2014, where four faculty read and rated a random sample of student artifacts from the courses. During the morning of the first day, a calibration session was conducted. First, faculty thoroughly reviewed and discussed the rubric and then independently applied the rubric to three sample artifacts. Raters shared their ratings and discussed any differences that arose after each “round” of rating. This discussion helped faculty come to a common understanding of what the student learning outcomes (SLO) meant and what to look for when rating the artifacts using the rubric’s scale: exceeds standard, meets standard, approaches standard, needs attention. Once individual ratings on a shared artifact did not differ by more than one point, raters were given a set of 15 artifacts to rate. The artifacts were read twice by faculty and scored using the rubric. If faculty ratings differed by more than 1 point on the majority of the outcomes, the artifact was sent to a third reader.

None of the reviews required a third read due to discrepancies in ratings. A full description of the methodology, including inter-rater reliability data and the rubric can be found on the Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Assessment’s website: <https://tinyurl.com/geneduc>

Results

An overview of the findings by SLO is presented in Table 2. The Interpreting the Past outcome that received the highest ratings was *identify, explain, and use historical concepts and terms* (SLO 2: 88% exceeds and meets). The lowest rated outcome was *make effective logical and coherent argument based upon factual evidence* (SLO 6: 62% exceeds and meets).

Table 2. Interpreting the Past assessment results



*SLO 1 was not assessed during the Assessment Summit because it was not required of students in the syllabi of general education History courses at the time.

Feedback

The results of the assessment were shared with the department, and served as a vehicle for discussion and thinking about future improvements to the History program.

Recommendations

- Gain access to more HIST courses