

**History Department  
Assessment Plan for BA in History and Social Studies**

20 May 2007

prepared by Thomas J. Humphrey, Director of Undergraduate  
Studies

**Introduction/Context**

The department administers two BA programs, one in History and one in Social Studies. We currently have 138 History majors and 109 Social Studies majors. Approximately 39 Social Studies majors are double majors in History. Social Studies majors take the bulk of their content courses in the History Department and take a Minor in Secondary Education. By combining these courses of study, students prepare themselves for state licensure to teach. Social Studies majors currently take at least 40 credit hours of History, while incoming students to CSU who major in History will also take 40 credit hours. The coursework for these majors overlaps considerably. As approved in previous assessment reports, the assessment of the two programs is administered jointly.

Since 2002, the History Department faculty has been discussing the goals for our BA programs in Social Studies, but especially in History. We have based our discussions on feedback acquired since 2002 and on determining whether program was skills-based or content-based. Social Studies students take many of the same courses, and we are pursuing the possibility of using the Praxis II exam as a content-based measure of the students' experiences in the program. For History, majors were required to take only geographically or chronologically distributed classes. It was conceivable that any two individual majors might not take the same courses. Such a course of study made assessing content-based goals unreasonable. The faculty has focused on the creation of skills-based goals (goals #2 and #3 below), which we assessed in 2004 and 2005, and which we have assessed again for 2006.

To fully realize the advantages of a skills-based major, and to enhance the content-based aspect of the major, effective 2007-2008 the History Department has adopted a platform for a new major. Students coming in under the new major will take more upper level courses spread out over different geographic regions. We have, however, also linked geography to chronology, and students have the option of taking courses in similar time periods but over different geographic regions. We have made similar changes for the minor in History. Finally,

History majors are required to take a research-based seminar, or capstone course, in the latter stages of their careers at CSU. That capstone will require students to conduct primary source based research, and it will give History majors a common experience.

The third goal (#1 below) is a value-based goal that examines the extent to which students have valued the study of History, Social Studies, or both. We have been collecting that data from 2004. The results and procedures are outlined below.

### **New Assessment Initiative**

In 2004, the History Department began a more systematic collection and analysis of the results from the Praxis II exam taken by all Social Studies majors to fulfill state licensure requirements. The Social Studies majors are a subset of our overall BA program, but they take the same courses that our History BA students take. As a result, the Praxis II results could reveal information about our Social Studies majors and, less directly, our History majors. We have not, however, tied this data to specific goals. We intend to develop those goals in AY 2007-2008.

### **Program Goals**

**Goal #1:** Students will appreciate the value of studying History. This goal was developed in 2002 by the History Faculty, and the information has been reviewed annually since. The findings each year suggest that this goal is still a valid tool for assessing the program.

**Outcome measures:** We look for statements that reflect students noting the process of change over time, the application of historical lessons to today's problems, and the study of history to further one's career. The faculty developed these outcome measures in 2002 and we continue to find them relevant.

**Research Methods:** Indirect and ongoing. In an exit interview they must have before they can graduate, the History Department asks all of its graduating students to respond to questions concerning their experiences as a History major. We ask: What do you see to be the value of having studied history? How has an understanding of history contributed to your understanding of the human experience and your place in it? Approximately 95 percent of students return a response.

**Findings:** Students responded directly and specifically in 2006-2007. Their responses were not common or general. Most spoke of how studying History broadened their cultural and political perspectives by making them aware of the different societies in the world. Nearly every student spoke of developing critical

thinking skills they apply to today's issues. Many spoke of the skills they developed, and how those skills—research skills, critical thinking, writing coherently—would enhance their status on the job market or would benefit them in their current job.

**Review:** In 2006-2007, graduating seniors wrote an essay addressing these issues as part of their exit interview, and they discussed them with the Director of Undergraduate Studies during their exit interview. In the spring of 2007, the Director of Undergraduate Studies reviewed their responses and reported the results.

**Action:** The History Department will continue an annual review of these materials, **and the Director of Undergraduate Studies will ask the Department to have new questions to more fully address these issues.**

**Goal #2:** Students will demonstrate analytical thinking skills in their written work. This goal was developed by 2004 by the faculty of the History Department. In 2006-2007, the Department reviewed this goal and determined it was still an appropriate goal for the program.

**Outcome Measures:** Analytical thinking skills are demonstrated by: the ability to identify an historical question; provide cogent answers to that question; the ability to do more than narrate events by offering an analysis of the events' contextual significance; ability to perform synthetic analysis of many sources. These outcome measures were developed by the faculty in 2004, and there has been no need to modify them.

**Research:** Direct and ongoing. When students declare a major in History or Social Studies, they submit a writing sample during their entrance interview. These writing samples serve as a baseline sample of students' writing skills. When students come in for their exit interview, required before we sign off on their graduate application, they hand in a second paper, which serves as a benchmark for what the student thinks is her best work. Roughly ninety five percent of students hand in these papers. A committee of four faculty, the Undergraduate Committee and the Director of Undergraduate Studies, reads a random sample of the papers using a standard rubric. We read approximately ten to twelve papers, which corresponds to roughly one-fourth the number of graduating seniors. The committee meets, and the Director reports the committee's findings to the Department the following fall.

**Findings:** In 2007, the committee reported that all of the exit interview samples demonstrated "Excellent," "Good," or "Fair" critical thinking skills. None were scored "Poor." The committee regarded approximately thirty percent of the papers

as "Excellent," approximately half as "Good," and less than one-fifth as "Fair." The committee felt, however, that students in History should follow standardized forms for bibliographies and citations, and that the variety of assignments submitted by students make it difficult to systematically review the students' work. **For the first, the Director will discuss posting or linking to a set of guidelines for students. The second concern has led to a specific action below.**

**Review:** Continue with annual review of these materials; Director of Undergraduate Studies meets with review committee first and then reports findings to department in the fall.

**Actions:** Will continue to annually review these materials; will continue to rotate the membership of the committee that reads the essays. **The Department has revised the History Major to include a capstone course in which students will write a primary-source based research paper. As they become available, this paper will hereafter serve as the writing sample for graduating seniors. Doing so will allow the committee to evaluate specific criteria such as synthesizing several sources, analyzing primary sources, and writing a coherent essay.**

**Goal #3:** Students will demonstrate effective written communication skills. In 2006, we reviewed this goal. It is still an appropriate goal.

**Outcome measures:** Effective written communication includes the following demonstrable skills: clear thesis statement; cogent organization of material; effective transitions; persuasive and evidenced-based arguments in support of a well-reasoned thesis; the use of specific evidence and examples.

**Research:** Direct and ongoing. When students declare a major in History or Social Studies, they submit a writing sample during their entrance interview. These writing samples become the baseline sample of student writing skills. Later, during the exit interview, students hand in what they consider to be their best work as an undergraduate. That paper becomes part of their graduation application in the History department. Approximately ninety five percent of students hand in these papers. A committee, the Undergraduate Committee and the Director of Undergraduate Studies, reads the papers, and the Director reports his findings the following Fall.

**Findings:** In 2007, the committee agreed that at least seventy five percent of the exit interview samples demonstrated either "Excellent" or "Good" written communication skills.

**Review:** Continue with annual review and presentation of findings to Department.

**Action:** Will continue annual review of these essays. The introduction of a capstone course for all History majors will provide a more stable baseline set of papers to evaluate in the future.