

Outcomes Assessment

Department of History & Political Science

B.A. History Major

Assessment Period: Fall 2017-Spring 2018

Date Submitted: 3 August 2018

Mission of the Department of History & Political Science

Historical and political awareness and understanding constitutes one of the chief attributes of a functional and involved citizen of the United States. It is the mission of this department to provide an education that will contribute to the realization of this ideal by every student. We also seek to train graduates to work in a variety of public and private sector jobs, utilizing their historical and political skills and knowledge. Finally, the department is committed to preserving, interpreting, and promoting the unique multicultural heritage of the region in which we live and work.

Goals of the History Program

It is our goal to train students for careers in teaching plus various kinds of professional employment. Professional applications of history include careers in public affairs, business, and the private sector where research, communication, and other liberal arts skills are required and appreciated. In addition, the program seeks to prepare students for advanced graduate programs in history and the law.

Program Student Outcomes

1. Upon completion of the history major, students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of major historical periods, figures, and developments.
2. Upon completion of the history major, students will be able to demonstrate a comprehension of the fundamental processes of historical analysis.
3. Upon completion of the history major, students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of the literature in given fields.
4. Upon completion of the history major, students will be able to write a historical paper that is well organized, that states and defends a position or thesis, that marshals evidence in support of that thesis, that demonstrates competent use of language, and that is formatted correctly.

Student Learning Outcome 1:

Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of major historical periods, figures, and developments.

NMHU Traits Specifically Linked to Student Learning Outcome 1:

- Mastery of content knowledge and skills

Means of Assessment for Outcome 1:

Grades from 300/400-level history classes offered during the spring semester are used for this outcome. Successful completion of this outcome will be indicated by at least 50% of history majors receiving a B or above in each of the courses.

Summary of Data:

History 435: ST: Europe’s Age of Crusades

Number of Students Meeting Criterion:	5	Number of Students Not Meeting Criterion:	0
Total Number of Students Assessed:	5	Percent of Students Meeting Criterion:	100%

History 347: Modern Mexico

Number of Students Meeting Criterion:	3	Number of Students Not Meeting Criterion:	2
Total Number of Students Assessed:	5	Percent of Students Meeting Criterion:	60%

History 301: Research Methods in History

Number of Students Meeting Criterion:	3	Number of Students Not Meeting Criterion:	2
Total Number of Students Assessed:	5	Percent of Students Meeting Criterion:	60%

History 480: Historiography

Number of Students Meeting Criterion:	3	Number of Students Not Meeting Criterion:	2
Total Number of Students Assessed:	5	Percent of Students Meeting Criterion:	60%

Interpretation of Results for Outcome 1:

Although there is some variation between courses, in 14 out of 20 cases overall, history majors earned a B or above in 300/400 level courses. In other words, we are exceeding our assessment goal of 50% of history majors attaining a B or above in upper division courses. Some of the ongoing difficulties that students are having in *History 301* and *History 480*, the only two courses currently required for students in our major, are addressed below; further revisions to our programs and courses are being contemplated.

Student Learning Outcome 2:

Students will be able to demonstrate a comprehension of the fundamental processes of historical analysis.

NMHU Traits Specifically Linked to Student Learning Outcome 2:

- Mastery of content knowledge and skills
- Effective communication skills
- Critical and reflective thinking skills
- Effective use of technology

Means of Assessment for Outcome 2:

The final research project in History 301 *Research Methods* is used for this assessment. The course instructor evaluates the paper based on the accuracy of the content, the use of literature in the field, the soundness of the historical argument and interpretation, the organization and logical progression of the argument, and the use of relevant sources to support the thesis/argument. A grade of B or above indicates a successful completion of this outcome.

Summary of Data:

Number of Students Meeting Criterion:	3	Number of Students Not Meeting Criterion:	2
Total Number of Students Assessed:	5	Percent of Students Meeting Criterion:	60%

Interpretation of Results for Outcome 2:

Well over half our majors (3 out of 5) earned an A or a B based on the criteria used for this assessment. *History 301* requires students to identify an original topic and practice developing a coherent historical argument and interpretation of their research over the course of one semester (all of this is done with the assistance and oversight of the professor). A challenging

course, it exposes students to the fundamental processes of historical research and analysis. Mastering these skills is essential for Highlands’s history majors to be competitive with those from other universities. Though some students struggle with the course, anecdotally they agree that the course not only enhances their overall academic skills, but also boosts their self-confidence as students and practitioners of historical methods.

Student Learning Outcome 3:

Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of historical literature in a given field.

NMHU Traits Specifically Linked to Student Learning Outcome 3:

- Mastery of content knowledge and skills
- Effective communication skills
- Critical and reflective thinking skills
- Effective use of technology

First Means of Assessment for Outcome 3:

The final oral presentation of the historiographical essay in *History 480 Historiography* is used for this assessment. The history faculty bases its evaluation on the student’s ability to accurately present the development of historical writing and thought as represented by a historian in a selected field. The presentation is scored according to a specific rubric, a copy of which is attached). A grade of “B” or better on the project will indicate a successful completion of this outcome.

Summary of Data:

Number of Students Meeting Criterion:	3	Number of Students Not Meeting Criterion:	2
Total Number of Students Assessed:	5	Percent of Students Meeting Criterion:	60%

Second Means of Assessment for Outcome 3:

The final essay in *History 480 Historiography* is used for this assessment. The course instructor evaluates the paper on the basis of the student’s analysis of the historical argument of a work by a historian in a particular field, and the student’s ability to place that argument in relation to other writing in the same field and/or by the same author. A grade of B or above will indicate the successful completion of this outcome.

Summary of Data:

Number of Students Meeting Criterion:	3	Number of Students Not Meeting Criterion:	2
Total Number of Students Assessed:	5	Percent of Students Meeting Criterion:	60%

Interpretation of Results for Outcome 3:

The two assessments above measure outcomes of the second required course in the history major. *History 480* teaches, among other things, how historical writing is itself reflective of the preoccupations of the time and place in which it was written. Students are required to analyze the work of a particular scholar and then place that work within the larger body of historical writing on the same subject or within the body of work by the same author. *History 480* is the most intellectually rigorous of the required courses for the major. More than half of our majors were able to earn an A or a B on the oral presentations of their analysis, while half were able effectively to present their analysis in writing.

Student Learning Outcome 4:

Upon completion of the history major, students will be able to write a historical paper that is well organized, that states and defends a position or thesis, marshals evidence in support of that thesis, demonstrates competent use of language, and that is formatted correctly.

NMHU Traits Specifically Linked to Student Learning Outcome 4:

- Mastery of content knowledge and skills
- Effective communication skills
- Critical and reflective thinking skills
- Effective use of technology

Means of Assessment for Outcome 4:

The final research project in *History 301 Research Methods* is used for this assessment. The history faculty will evaluate the paper on the basis of a clear statement of an organizing thesis, the accuracy and development of a historical argument, the clarity of expression, and the proper formatting of a historical essay. The paper will be scored on the basis of the attached rubric. A score 3.0 or above will indicate a successful completion of this outcome.

Summary of Data:

Number of Students Meeting Criterion:	3	Number of Students Not Meeting Criterion:	2
Total Number of Students Assessed:	5	Percent of Students Meeting Criterion:	60 %

Interpretation of Results for Outcome 4:

The rubric for this assessment is attached. Three out of five majors achieved a 3.0 or above on their final research paper based on the criteria outlined in the rubric. *History 301* has one overall objective: to teach students how to research, analyze, and write like historians. Even when students have to repeat the class—and the number having to do so has been very small over the history of the course—our majors agree that this course is transformative, honing their academic skills and historical imaginations.

Utilization of Results:

The Outcomes Assessment process continues to inform the history faculty’s discussions of our program. We have made *History 454: History through Film* a permanent part of our course offerings, and it was taught in Fall 2017. Faculty continue to experiment with variety of media and types of historical representation and seek to introduce more guest speakers while building bridges with other institutions. Faculty have hosted guest lectures by visiting scholars at the United World College and political activists and authors from the community. The faculty have also offered more courses online. One faculty member tried offering *History 100 The Western World* online, and has taught at least one and sometimes two online courses every semester. Members of the faculty regularly participate in professional development courses such as Writing Across the Curriculum and On Course seminars to enhance their teaching and to improve our writing outcomes. The History faculty is still considering ways to reorganize *History 480* to demonstrate the fundamentals of historiographical analysis while making it more accessible to our undergraduates. One idea previously discussed is to focus the course on a particular topic chosen by the professor and study that topic through a historiographical lens. These discussions are continuing. Our efforts to continue the improvement of our undergraduate program are hampered, however, by a lack of personnel. The retirement of the department’s sole Americanist has made it impossible to offer all of the courses traditionally offered, and makes planning and operationalizing program changes increasingly difficult.

We remain committed to maintaining the academic rigor and breadth of our program despite a decline in the number of majors that is consistent with nationwide trends. As an academic discipline, history requires that students read extensively and develop their writing skills. This can be difficult for many of our students even if they demonstrate some ability and are interested in interpreting and handling the raw materials of historical analysis. The faculty unanimously agree that if our majors are to compete with graduates from other programs, they must master the foundational skills emphasized in our program. History majors have many options open to them after graduation including postgraduate study, law school, teaching, political office, archival and museum work, as well as government employment in the diplomatic service, the park service, and intelligence agencies. Any of these positions, however, require our students to read critically, to write analytically, and to interpret both narrative and quantitative data.

Changes to Program Based on Results:

We designed a new course, *History 435: ST: The Cold War*, which was offered—with considerable success—in the fall 2017 semester. The course was offered as a selected topics course in Fall 2017, and may be added to the regular offerings of the program. *History through Film* was added to the course catalog as a regular offering, and taught in Fall 2017 as *History 454: Latin American History through Film*. Faculty are also considering other topics that might provide more accessibility to the concepts underlying historiography, and are piloting potential new offerings as Selected Topics courses. In Spring 2018, one faculty member offered such a course, *History 435-535: Europe's Age of Crusades*. Finally, faculty are continuing to explore techniques for improving student writing and active learning by attending developmental seminars. We have developed two and four year “degree roadmaps” to help both faculty and students plan their programs so that they get practice with research and writing during their junior year to prepare them for both *Hist 480: Historiography* and other upper division courses in their final year.

Retention Strategies:

The history faculty have attendance policies that help faculty recognize those students who need assistance and advising early in the semester. In our lower division courses, faculty regularly participate in Attendance Alert and Early Alert. The faculty remain committed to advising students on an

individual basis, and both *History 301* and *History 480* have individual meetings with faculty built into the courses. Faculty regularly invite students in lower division courses to meet with them if they are interested in the History major and, in addition, try to identify students with the skills to complete the major. We are continuing to schedule extracurricular events, for example a celebration of Constitution Day in September 2018, to make History both as a discipline and as a program more visible on campus and in the community. We are currently reviewing the departmental Strategic Plan to strengthen our retention efforts. We continue to struggle in our retention efforts due to unfilled vacancies in the department. The retirement of Dr. Ross in December 2017 has made programming and other retention oriented activities significantly more difficult.

