STUDENT LEARNING ASSESSMENT REPORT

SUBMITTED BY: JOHN PATRICK MULLINS
DATE: SEPTEMBER 2013

BRIEFLY DESCRIBE WHERE AND HOW ARE DATA AND DOCUMENTS USED TO GENERATE THIS REPORT BEING STORED: THE DATA ARE OBTAINED FROM PARTICIPATING FACULTY AND STORED IN DR. MULLINS’S OFFICE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

List all of the program’s learning outcomes: (regardless of whether or not they are being assessed this year)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Outcome</th>
<th>Year of Last Assessment</th>
<th>Year of Next Planned Assessment</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate satisfactory knowledge of theory for history majors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrate satisfactory skills in undergraduate research and writing skills</td>
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<td>necessary for history</td>
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<tr>
<td>OUTCOME THREE: Students will be able to communicate effectively in oral and</td>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>2012-2013</td>
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<td>written forms and apply problem solving and analytical skills to attain</td>
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<td>professional goals. (revised, September 2012)</td>
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<td>OUTCOME ONE: Students will be able to comprehend historical events through</td>
<td>2011-2012</td>
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<td>identification of their causes and consequences and analysis of primary and</td>
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<tr>
<td>secondary evidentiary sources by means of close reading of texts within</td>
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<td>historical context. (revised, September 2012)</td>
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<td>OUTCOME TWO: Students will be able to research and integrate evidence from</td>
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<td>2012-2013</td>
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<td>primary and secondary sources by synthesizing data into a general interpretation</td>
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<tr>
<td>of past events in a logically structured, interpretive paper that applies</td>
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<tr>
<td>knowledge of historical theory and method. INQUIRY OUTCOME (revised, September</td>
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<td>2012)</td>
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Describe how the program’s outcomes support Marymount’s Mission, Strategic Plan, and relevant school plan:

Marymount’s history faculty view “academic excellence” and preservation of “the liberal arts tradition” as inherent to the History Program mission as they are central to the Mission of the University. Through its internship program, which places students in
some of the best historical and research settings in the region, the program also implements the University mission’s prioritization of career preparation and opportunities for professional growth. The Student Research Conference offers history majors another opportunity for building professional skills. Finally, as is demonstrated in the analysis of the first two outcomes of this report, the work of the program reflects the “Scholarship” hallmark claimed by the University, encouraging and rewarding intellectual curiosity.

The Shared Strategic Priorities described in the 2009 Strategic Plan emphasize “Enhancing the Intellectual Experience through rigorous programs that nurture scholarship and inquiry.” Learning Outcomes One and Two in this report reflect student achievement in the History Capstone course, Senior Seminar. This course requires seniors to complete a research paper of significant length that involves inquiry into important historical questions. Completion of this course requires research into evidentiary sources—including analysis of primary sources and scholarly literature—and synthesis of evidence into a general interpretation applying knowledge of theory and method.

Students must have acquired the skills and historical knowledge required in history major courses throughout their undergraduate program of study in order to accomplish successfully goals of the Senior Seminar. As mentioned above, the internship offers another avenue for majors to travel to “achieve personal and professional goals” that are cited as a part of the strategic priorities in the 2009 Strategic Plan.

Provide a brief description of the assessment process used, including strengths, challenges and planned improvements:

The assessment process focused on two performance areas: the Senior Seminar and the Internship. These are the areas that best reveal the performance of students at the time that they are completing their studies in the history major.

This year, one of the three outcomes (Outcome Three) drew upon student performance in HI 400 Internship, while the two remaining outcomes drew upon student performance in HI 420 Senior Seminar. As noted above, the centrality of historical research to Senior Seminar makes that course peculiarly well suited to assessment of interpretive thinking and critical understanding of history as well as inquiry-based learning, as per Outcomes One and Two. Moreover, Senior Seminar is the only classroom-based course at Marymount restricted entirely to History Majors.

The applied aspect of the assessment process continues to be an examination of student performance ratings in various types of work sites that require them to demonstrate intellectual skills outlined on the university’s internship evaluation form for internship site supervisors.

One challenge facing the History Program in assessment of its student learning this academic year is the lack of a course other than Senior Seminar restricted entirely to History Majors. In 2012-2013, the History Program began offering HI 250 Research and Writing as a course separate from POL 250, whereas previously the two had been cross-listed for both programs. While targeting History Majors, HI 250 remains open to non-History Majors.

Another challenge has been the lack of sufficient faculty to support the process. In Fall 2012, the History Program gained a new full-time faculty member, European historian Dr. Jace Stuckey. In 2012-2013, there were only two full-time regular faculty
members within the History Program. The October 1st death of our colleague, Prof. Rhett Leverett—who had long served the History Program on an adjunct or term appointment basis—was a tremendous crisis for the department. The Department of History and Politics was stretching very thin over this academic year, not least because of two simultaneous job searches for the History Program. The 2012-2013 academic year was a particularly challenging one for the History Program, as had been the year preceding it. But we weathered the storm, thanks in no small part to our new colleague, Dr. Stuckey.

**Describe how the program implemented its planned improvements from last year:**

The 2011-2012 Student Learning Assessment Plan for the History Program submitted in September 2012 included revised student learning outcomes. With much appreciated guidance from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, we revised the learning outcomes to bring them in line with the recommendations of the UAC’s Review of the previous year’s assessment plan. For example:

1) Outcome One was revised to make “comprehension” the desired learning outcome as demonstrated through “close reading of texts within historical context.” This revision makes explicit the specific measurable skill we want the student to acquire, whereas the previous phrasing required the student to “demonstrate knowledge” and engage in “application of theories” without specifying the method of doing so.

2) While the revised Outcome One emphasized analysis (one form of inquiry), the revised Outcome Two emphasized another form of inquiry: synthesis. In so doing, it also conveyed application of historical interpretive theory and the generation of scholarship (the research paper) as measurable skills the History Program wants its students to develop. This revision set the intellectual bar for graduating History Majors higher than the original Outcome Two, which had a “well written paper” as the desired outcome.

3) In light of the program’s commitment to the university mission of advancing “academic excellence,” the outcome (Outcome Three) of merely “satisfactory” performance and “competency” was revised to require “effective” communication and application of skills.

The instructor of Senior Seminar in Spring 2013 changed the learning outcomes in his course syllabus to reflect these revisions, and taught Senior Seminar accordingly. In accordance with the revised Outcome One, students devoted a great deal of class time on close reading/examination and written or oral analysis of primary source documents, images, and artifacts, as well as primary and secondary source films, in addition to seminar-style discussion of assigned secondary-source readings.

**Provide a response to last year’s University Assessment Committee review of the program’s learning assessment report:**

In its 2012 Review Guidelines for the History Program’s Student Learning Assessment Plan for 2011-2012, the University Assessment Committee approved the report’s revision of learning outcomes, the measures the History Program uses for those learning outcomes, the collection and assessment of student work, the subsequent analysis of results, the implementation of improvements from the previous year’s assessment plan, and the plan’s addressing of the UAC’s recommendations from the previous year.
With respect to the plan’s use of assessment to make curricular improvements, the UAC found that the History Program had partially met this goal, in that the planned improvements for Outcomes One and Two were appropriately specific, while the planned improvements for Outcome Three were “too general.”

The UAC had three specific recommendations for improvement.

1) **Outcome Three as written actually conveyed two distinct outcomes, one that focuses on communication and the other on analysis and problem solving.** The UAC suggested revising Outcome Three accordingly. This concern also speaks to the above mentioned criticism that Outcome Three was “too general.” While Outcomes One and Two are assessed through student performance in HI 420 Senior Seminar, the purpose of Outcome Three is to assess student performance in experiential learning through HI 400 Internship. The focus of Outcome Three, then, is not communication, analysis, or problem solving per se, but rather the attainment of “professional goals” by means of communication, analysis, and problem solving within the context of the internship. Internships require oral and written communication skills, analysis, and problem solving but a) all toward the larger end of attainment of professional goals and b) each in different ways, with differing emphases.

We would prefer not to separate out communication from analysis and problem solving as two separate learning outcomes, for fear of diluting the purpose of Outcome Three: the students’ attainment of professional goals. We would also prefer not to make Outcome Three more specific.

Outcome Three applies to internships that vary broadly in the kind and degree of communication, analysis, and problem solving they require: from reorganization of archives to recording of oral histories, from service as a museum docent to original writing for a museum website. It would be difficult to specify the means by which students are expected to meet these outcomes without narrowing the range of work our History Interns are expected to do.

If the UAC still has concerns (in light of these explanations) with the phrasing of Outcome Three with respect to the focus on professional goals and/or the lack of specificity (by comparison with Outcomes One and Two), we will welcome recommendations and gladly find a way to rephrase Outcome Three appropriately.

2) **Expand on the analysis of difference in performance by transfer and first college students.** The 2011-2012 assessment report noted that, while student performance in HI 420 Senior Seminar and HI 400 Internship met or exceeded the criteria on the whole, a three transfer students struggled in both courses and brought down the overall performance of the graduating class. In its Interpretation of Results, the assessment report concluded that the single biggest problem for all three students in both Senior Seminar and the Internship was deficiency in written communication.
The creation of a new HI 250 Research and Writing course that is both Writing Intensive and targeted for History Majors should help students transferring to Marymount’s History Program be better prepared for the research and writing expectations of HI 420 and HI 400. (See #3 below for further discussion of HI 250.)

With respect to the need for further analysis of the difference in performance between transfer and four-year History Majors in 2012-2013, the short version is that the difference evaporated. (See Interpretation of Results for Outcome Two for elaboration on this issue.)

3) **Explore other opportunities in curriculum for collaboration amongst majors before Senior Year.** In previous academic years, History Majors were required to take a course called Research and Writing that was cross-listed with Politics. HI/POL 250 was populated by both Majors, and some non-Majors, and taught alternately by Politics or History faculty. The content of the course and the method of assessment differed on the basis of the discipline of the instructor. The Department of History and Politics concluded that the Majors of both programs would be better served with the bifurcation of HI/POL 250.

History Majors take Research and Writing in their sophomore year (or in the first semester that they transfer to Marymount). Under this new reform, they cultivate research and writing skills according to the standards and practices of the history profession, acquire deeper historical knowledge from their research project than they would get from another history course oriented primarily to non-Majors, and receive an introduction to questions of interpretation and methodology. History Majors take Research and Writing in their sophomore year (or in the first semester they transfer to Marymount), so they will receive this training and experience before facing the challenges of Senior Seminar and the Internship.

Although HI 250 is oriented primarily toward History Majors, the History Program cannot count student performance in HI 250 for program assessment purposes, because the course remains open to non-Majors. The cancellation of a section of HI 250 proposed for Spring 2013 due to insufficient enrollment has shown that the History Program does not have enough Majors (30-40 each year on average) to sustain more than one section of HI 250 per academic year, hence the need to keep it open to non-Majors. Our History Majors would be well served by more classroom courses (other than Senior Seminar) which are restricted to Majors, but the numbers of students majoring in History at Marymount cannot sustain such courses at this time.

We hope that these circumstances will change as we grow the Major. At this time and for the foreseeable future, it is safe to say that the History curriculum at Marymount exists primarily to serve the needs of non-Majors seeking to satisfy the requirements of the University’s Liberal Arts Core Curriculum. In the absence of more collaboration among Majors within the curriculum before Senior
Year, the History Program will continue to cultivate *extracurricular collaboration* among History Majors, as with the activities of the student-led History and Politics Club and campus activities fostered by the Department’s American Heritage Initiative.

**Outcome and Past Assessment**

**Learning Outcome 1:**
Students will be able to comprehend historical events through identification of their causes and consequences and analysis of primary and secondary evidentiary sources by means of close reading of texts within historical context.

*Is this outcome being reexamined?* ☑ Yes ☐ No

*If yes, give a brief summary of previous results (including trends) and any changes made to the program.*

**Assessment Activity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Measures</th>
<th>Performance Standard</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Explain how student learning will be measured and indicate whether it is direct or indirect.</td>
<td>Define and explain acceptable level of student performance.</td>
<td>Discuss the data collected and student population</td>
<td>1) Describe the analysis process. 2) Present the findings of the analysis including the numbers participating and deemed acceptable.</td>
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**Direct Measure:**
The direct measures for History Majors in HI 420 Senior Seminar are short analytical response papers on assigned reading of secondary-source scholarly articles as well as active participation in classroom activities, which include seminar-style discussion of assigned articles, group examination and analysis of primary-source documents, images, and artifacts, and oral and written

**Direct Measure:**
A “meets the Criteria” rating or better on two thirds of the items on the rubric achieved by two thirds of the class is the acceptable level of student performance.

**Direct Measures:**
Results of student participation in class and on short papers submitted according to course requirements.

If students achieved the acceptable level of performance on this outcome, the instructor assesses their analytical skills adequate to meet program expectations. The instructor has this in mind when choosing common readings and approving research topics. It is hoped that 37% of a student’s final grade in this capstone course is considered substantial enough to motivate students to seek excellence in the exercise of their analytical skills. All 11 students enrolled in HI 420 in Spring 2013 met or excelled the criteria for analytical reasoning in the writing of response papers and participation in class activities. Students who “meet the criteria” on this learning outcome demonstrated skill in the analysis and comprehension of primary and
Academic Year: 2012-13  
Program: History

| Analysis of primary and secondary source film. (revised September 2013) | Secondary sources, as well as understanding of the content for this course: specifically, how historians study human behavior in the past, the methods they use to acquire evidence of this subject, and the theories of human nature they apply in interpreting that evidence. (revised September 2013) |

**Interpretation of Results**

**Extent this Learning Outcome has been achieved by students (Use both direct and indirect measure results):**

Based on the direct measure (Analytic Response papers and class participation), the first learning outcome was successfully fulfilled by eleven out of eleven students. This year there was no indirect measurement tool.

**Program strengths and opportunities for improvement relative to assessment of outcome:**

By the time the students came to this capstone course, they were well prepared in their analytical and writing skills thanks to the HI 250 Research and Writing course and their previous experience in upper-division history courses. Some students excelled at written and oral analysis of scholarly articles, and all students were at least satisfactory in their performance. Student performance on the direct measure in previous Student Learning Outcome Reports suggests that the program is strong overall in the area measured by this outcome, but there remains room for improvement in leading our students to academic excellence.

In the wake of the revision of Learning Outcome one in the 2011-2012 Student Learning Assessment Report, the decision was made for Senior Seminar students, beginning in Spring 2013, to engage in close analysis of a balanced mix of scholarly articles and primary sources (documents, images, artifacts) as well as films in Senior Seminar, testing their analytical powers with a variety of sources.

**Discuss planned curricular or program improvements for this year based on assessment of outcome:**

The Program could use improvement in preparing students for understanding of theory and methodology in the history discipline. It is difficult to address this problem before the capstone course, since upper-division courses serves primarily the needs of the Core and are not mainly populated by History Majors, but the bifurcation of HI/POL 250 has enabled the History faculty to provide students an effective introduction to historical methods before Senior Seminar. Since all students met the criteria for the first learning outcome in 2012-2013, no overhaul of the curriculum or program with respect to this outcome is currently under consideration.
Learning Outcome 2: (Inquiry Outcome)
Students will be able to research and integrate evidence from primary and secondary sources by synthesizing data into a general interpretation of past events in a logically structured, interpretive paper that applies knowledge of historical theory and method.

Is this outcome being reexamined? ☑ Yes ☐ No

If yes, give a brief summary of previous results (including trends) and any changes made to the program.
Previous results with the previous outcome should not differ from results in 2011-2012 with the revised outcome, since the revision is not reflective of a program change, being largely a semantic change (more focused language employing stronger action-verbs, recommended by the 2009-2010 UAC review and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness).

Assessment Activity

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<td>1) Describe the analysis process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Measure: The research prospectus, two drafts of the final research paper, and oral class presentation of research required in Senior Seminar HI 420 will provide the data. The measures are identified in the rubric.</td>
<td>Direct Measure: The acceptable level of student performance will be a “meets the Criteria” rating achieved by two thirds of the class on two thirds of the items on the rubric.</td>
<td>The written/electronic documentation of the research paper, prospectus, and presentation will provide data for measurement of the outcome as performed by a sample of eleven students.</td>
<td>2) Present the findings of the analysis including the numbers participating and deemed acceptable.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eleven students engaged in original research of both primary and secondary sources and produced a 15 page research paper that included a review of the scholarly literature, analysis of primary source documents, and an original analysis of the chosen subject. Toward that end, all students explained their work to the instructor in a research tutorial and a research prospectus, submitted a first draft and a second draft that implemented required revisions, and presented their research findings in an...</td>
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Interpretation of Results

**Extent this Learning Outcome has been achieved by students (Use both direct and indirect measure results):**
Based on the direct measure (research paper drafts, tutorial, prospectus, oral presentation), eleven out of eight students met or exceeded the criteria for Learning Outcome Two. This year there was no indirect measurement tool.

**Program strengths and opportunities for improvement relative to assessment of outcome:**
Because all students are required to take the HI 250 Research and Writing course, and because all upper division courses in history require an analytical/research paper of some kind, students come to the capstone course with considerable experience in forming a research question, developing a thesis, presenting an argument, research primary and secondary sources, and writing a research paper.

In our 2011-2012 Student Learning Assessment Report, the History Faculty indicated that three transfer students among the eight students taking Senior Seminar in Spring 2012 were an exception to this rule of experience and preparedness. The UAC’s Review Guidelines for this report asked us to expand upon the difference in performance between transfers and History Majors who completed four years of study at Marymount.

The report for 2012-2013 can happily report that this gap was wholly absent in the Spring 2013 Senior Seminar. Of the eleven enrolled students, two of them were transfer students, and they proved to be two of the finest students ever to graduate from Marymount’s History Program (one of them winning the first Rhett Leverett Award for Academic Excellence in History in Spring 2013).

It appears that the difference expressed in last year’s report was largely a result of a particular crop of struggling transfers, just as this year’s results are slanted in the other direction. Our tentative conclusion is that there is not an innate problem in the History Program with assimilating transfer students and holding them to the same standards as other History Majors. We will, however, remain watchful in the 2013-2014 academic year for any evidence of a recurring gap between transfers and four-year Majors.
Academic Year: 2012-13  
Program: History

Discuss planned curricular or program improvements for this year based on assessment of outcome:
Since all students met the criteria for this learning outcome, no overhaul of the curriculum or program with respect to this outcome is currently under consideration.

The greater reliance on group work and in-class reading to assess Outcome One allowed students more time to focus on the research and writing of the research paper and the completion of associated assignments (tutorial, prospectus, class presentation), enabling them to improve performance on formulation of an appropriate research question, writing skills, interpretation of sources, and presentation of a logically structured argument.

Outcome and Past Assessment

Learning Outcome 3:
Students will be able to communicate effectively in oral and written forms and apply problem solving and analytical skills to attain professional goals.

Is this outcome being reexamined? ☑ Yes ☐ No

If yes, give a brief summary of previous results (including trends) and any changes made to the program.

Previous results with the previous outcome should not differ substantially from results in 2012-2013 with the revised outcome, since the revision is not reflective of a program change, being largely a semantic change.

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<tr>
<td>The direct measure for the outcome is selected criteria taken from the Career and Internship Employer Evaluation of Student Internship Performance Form that every internship site supervisor completes.</td>
<td>Direct Measure: The acceptable level of student performance will be a good or excellent rating on 10 or the 14 criteria selected from the CIC Employer Evaluation of Internship Form – achieved by 80% of the</td>
<td>Submission of the Internship Journal, Summary Reflective Statement, and the completed CIC Student Evaluation Form is an internship requirement stated in the Internship Syllabus make up the data</td>
<td>Direct Measure: 1. Describe the analysis process. Site supervisors were given the CIC evaluation at the beginning of the internship so that they would be familiar with the criteria on which we wanted them to rate students. We chose those performance criteria that most closely relate to the academic aspects of the program since performance levels on applied skills and knowledge are our primary concern. While it was not used as a measurement tool, the Academic Internship Mentor interviews the site supervisor</td>
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## Interpretation of Results

**Extent this Learning Outcome has been achieved by students (Use both direct and indirect measure results):**

As noted in the narrative above and the tabulations on the rubric below, all students met the criteria for this Learning Outcome. Site supervisors assessed the performance of five out of eight students as excellent and three out of eight as good. The overwhelming preponderance of History interns who exceeded the criteria demonstrates the strength of the History program with respect to Outcome Three.

**Program strengths and opportunities for improvement relative to assessment of outcome:**

The History Program has a reputation among students for being one of the more challenging programs. Perhaps because students do have to persevere through a fair amount of reading and writing—and many classes require presentations—students do well when they...
apply their knowledge in the workplace. This year’s employer evaluations and written work indicate that Marymount’s History Majors as a whole excel at professionalism, collegiality, and independent research, and writing skills.

**Discuss planned curricular or program improvements for this year based on assessment of outcome:**

It would be helpful to broaden the range of internship contacts established by the program, so as to better match internships with student interests and strengths.

The data from 2011-2012 indicates that the History Program has well prepared its Majors to thrive with experiential learning and to excel at applying their training and habits from undergraduate studies to professional objectives in a “real world” environment, in fulfillment of Outcome Three. There is not at present a plan for a curricular or program overhaul, nor do we think one is needed.