

**History Department
Annual Assessment Report
November 2008**

I. Program Mission

The History Department is committed to fostering learning through a faculty dedicated equally to teaching and research, whose members model academic excellence for students. The History Department seeks to provide each major with a broad-based introduction to the discipline of history, a sense of the approaches and methods specific to the discipline, and a chance to engage in the techniques used by practicing historians. In addition, the department seeks to instill the broader skills of critical reading, writing, and thinking.

The mission of the department is in keeping with the DU values of excellence, innovation, engagement, integrity, and inclusiveness. Our Senior Seminar sequence, the capstone of the major, enables each History student to engage in advanced scholarly inquiry and to generate new knowledge, in accordance with DU's mission. We foster an intellectually vibrant community among the faculty and students, and encourage students both to synthesize knowledge and to create new scholarship.

II. Learning Outcomes

The History Department has identified six learning outcomes. These learning outcomes have been in place since 2004, and continue to reflect the department's agenda. Each major will learn to:

1. Write clearly and effectively;
2. Identify and evaluate arguments and the use of evidence in secondary sources;
3. Devise historical questions and formulate arguments that answer those questions;
4. Use evidence effectively to construct a historical interpretation;
5. Understand the concept of historiography and engage in historiographical debate;
6. Engage in research that integrates primary and secondary sources.

A new major, made effective September 2008, is designed to ensure that all courses are clearly related to these goals. All courses require extensive writing, and faculty members work with students in all courses to improve their writing. Use of evidence is addressed differently in 2000- and 3000-level courses; 2000-level courses place an emphasis on primary sources, and have as their goal that students should gain a familiarity with how historians work with different kinds of primary sources and the kinds of questions that historians ask about such sources. 3000-level courses are upper-level seminars; these courses emphasize secondary sources and are meant to introduce students to the concept of historiography; students should become familiar with reading for argument and should understand that historians are in conversation with one another. What is History is designed then to increase familiarity with secondary sources and to train students in the details of historiographical work: identifying an argument; thinking about different schools of history; understanding how those approaches affect the kinds of questions historians ask as well as the kinds of sources they use; and evaluating the strengths and

weaknesses of a historical argument. Senior Seminar brings all these skills together when students develop an original work of scholarship that makes a contribution to their field.

III. Assessment Activities

Two primary kinds of data are collected to evaluate the achievement of the learning outcomes: student writing from the mandatory research capstone course, Senior Seminar; and student questionnaires.

The Senior Seminar capstone course, required for all History majors, is designed to unite the skills students have acquired during the major, and it is therefore an appropriate place to evaluate success in meeting the six learning outcomes. Students submit their final papers from Senior Seminar II to the DU Portfolio Community (DUPC). At the end of the year, a committee of three faculty members reads those papers and evaluates them using the departmental rubric (see Appendix 1). To ensure maximum student compliance, students are told that course grades will be withheld until they have uploaded their papers. Once the evaluation process is complete, the papers will be deleted from the DUPC to ensure student privacy.

Each student in Senior Seminar also fills out a survey at the end of the winter quarter. Having the students fill out the survey while enrolled in Senior Seminar helps ensure that nearly all graduating majors complete the form. This survey (see Appendix 2) addresses several key areas: students' understanding of the structure of the curriculum (i.e., why they have to take the courses they do); their experience of the three-quarter-long sequence from What is History to Senior Seminar; the weaknesses/strengths of the major as a whole (effectiveness of teaching, courses offered, intellectual rigor); and students' experiences with the mentoring system, both over the major as a whole (primarily academic advising) and during Senior Seminar (when mentors act as tutors guiding individual student research).

The most recent assessment was completed in the spring of 2008. Of our 15 graduating majors, 14 submitted their Senior Seminar paper for review, and 14 completed the student questionnaire. See attached spreadsheet summary of the results of the rubric assessment (since students fill out the questionnaire on paper, no electronic summary of the survey results is available).

In general, the assessment of Senior Seminar papers suggested that we are meeting our learning goals. In each of the nine rubric categories, a significant majority of scores were 3s or 4s (ranging from 67% to 81%). Whereas in the last assessment, most scores clustered around 3, in this round student performance was more evenly divided between 3s and 4s. In particular, 52% of the ratings gave 4s in category VII, relating to using evidence effectively to construct a historical interpretation. Ratings of 4 in other categories ranged from a low of 19% (in category II, on diction, syntax, and grammar) to a high of 45% (in category II, on grammar, punctuation, and format). Scores were lowest in category IV, on integrating primary and secondary sources, and this result supported the faculty's existing sense that students found it difficult to learn how to relate their own research and arguments to existing scholarship. Two students' papers were significantly

weaker than the others, receiving mostly 1s and 2s. One student received 4s in every category, in what the assessors agreed was a truly outstanding thesis. We were pleased with the overall results of the assessment.

Student response in the questionnaires was overwhelmingly positive. Of the 14 responses, 12 "strongly agreed" that majoring in History significantly furthered their intellectual development. Indeed, the vast majority of students "agreed" or strongly agreed" with questions in every category. There were only 6 questions out of 21 in which any students at all "disagreed," and only 1 "strongly disagree" response for the entire survey. In the questions regarding skills (section V), students were almost universally enthusiastic. On 5 of the questions, at least 11 students "strongly agreed" that they had mastered the skills in question; on the 3 others, 8 or 9 students did so. Student response was most varied in the questions regarding curriculum; 2 students "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" that they understood the difference between 2000- and 3000-level courses, and 5 students "disagreed" that they understood the purpose of the World History requirement. A few students remarked in comments that they wished there were a wider variety of courses or that certain courses were offered more frequently. In general, however, comments were extremely enthusiastic. Students praised the major and were particularly positive about their experiences dealing with the faculty, especially the individual mentoring that came with Senior Seminar. They noted that the three-quarter sequence from What is History to Senior Seminar was valuable, and one remarked that "this was my favorite part of the major." Students also singled out their improvement in writing skills: e.g., "I know that I am a better writer and researcher because of majoring in history"; "I am amazed at how I have grown as a writer."

A weakness that was raised in student questionnaires in the early years of the system was the impact of the major on students' skills in oral presentation. Although this is not one of our primary learning goals, we still felt that this was an area worth addressing. We did so partly informally, by agreeing to consider where in our individual classes we might incorporate more oral presentations. More important, however, was the establishment of the annual History Conference, first instituted in 2005, which requires our seniors to present their research to an audience of faculty and students. It is notable that in the most recent student questionnaire, 8 students "strongly agreed" and the remaining 6 "agreed" that they were much better at presenting their ideas orally because they majored in History.

IV. Faculty Discussion and Recommendations

Assessment results are circulated among the faculty and discussed at faculty meetings. Previous assessment rounds have led to the creation of What is History, the annual History Conference, and, most importantly, the new major structure (see below).

The recommendations that emerged from the latest assessment round are minor. The assessors noted that students still need to work on situating their research in relation to existing scholarship. In previous years we recognized a need to focus more on helping students learn how to formulate their own historical arguments; there has been a marked improvement in this area, but there is still opportunity for work here. The gap between

simply formulating an argument and constructing an argument that clearly articulates its significance is one that our students are still having difficulty bridging. Finally, in the last assessment round we raised the desirability of offering a prize for the best Senior Seminar paper; the assessors felt that it would be a positive experience for the outstanding work of our best students to be recognized, and for students to be aware that the department strongly values their achievements.

V. Implementation of Assessment-Informed Recommendations

The new major requirements implemented in September 2008 are the direct result of faculty discussions, throughout 2007-8, of recent assessment results and ways to improve the major. Although we felt that students were generally meeting our learning goals, students themselves had noted in questionnaires that they were unclear about the purpose of some of our courses, including the distinctions between different course levels (2000s vs. 3000s) and our requirement that students take two courses in "Issues in World History." The new major is explicitly structured around skill levels, with clear goals for the skills that students should master at each level. We hope that in addition to providing greater consistency across our courses and greater emphasis on the skills that students need throughout the major, the difference between course levels—and the purpose of those distinctions—will also become clearer to students. In addition, the new, more explicit emphasis on historiography in the 3000-level courses should help with students' abilities in that area, making them better prepared for both What is History and Senior Seminar. We also reduced our World History requirement to a single course and renamed it "Issues in Comparative History," reflecting the unifying commitment of that course to the theme of comparative history. Because we are generally meeting our learning outcomes, and because we have just implemented the new major, we will be looking carefully at the data over several years to determine the success of the new program.

We are working in Senior Seminars I and II to address the areas that most need improvement, according to recent assessment results:

- Situating work in relation to existing scholarship;
- Formulating historical arguments.

Most of this work is being done in individual meetings between students and their mentors, but we have also agreed to make the first issue a more explicit part of Senior Seminar II.

The department also agreed to create a prize for outstanding Senior Seminar paper. For the time being, we are funding the prize directly, but we hope in future years to work with the development office to create a named fund.

Appendix 1

History Department Assessment Rubric for Senior Seminar Papers

I. Ability to write clearly and effectively: Organization of essay is strong and systematic. Paragraphs are focused, coherent, unified, and adequately developed. Each paragraph has a purposeful relationship to the argument. Transitions between paragraphs are smooth and fitting.

n/a - Not Applicable

- 1 - Is only minimally organized and coherent.
- 2 - Has reasonable coherence but weak or confusing transitions and/or many paragraphs without topic sentences.
- 3 - Has a few unclear transitions and/or a few paragraphs without strong topic sentences or purposeful relationship to argument.
- 4 - Has a strong and systematic organization, excellent transitions, and purposeful relationships to argument.

II. Ability to write clearly and effectively: Diction, syntax, and style of essay are effective.

n/a - Not Applicable

- 1 - Errors in sentence structure or language are frequent and interfere with ease in reading the paper.
- 2 - Has frequent awkward sentences and/or word choices.
- 3 - Has economical and effective style; sentences are varied; word choice is good.
- 4 - Has active, economical, and effective style; sentences are interesting and varied; awareness of audience is strong; word choice is precise and sophisticated.

III. Ability to write clearly and effectively: Grammar, punctuation, and format in essay are correct.

n/a - Not Applicable

- 1 - Has pervasive, significant errors.
- 2 - Has numerous distracting errors.
- 3 - Has occasional errors, but they do not interfere with ease in reading the paper.
- 4 - Is free or almost free of errors.

IV. Ability to write clearly and effectively: Ideas in essay from primary and secondary sources are integrated and credited appropriately.

n/a - Not Applicable

- 1 - Quoted or paraphrased information is not integrated or it is documented incorrectly.
- 2 - Quoted or paraphrased information is often poorly integrated into sentences and paragraphs but is documented correctly or nearly correctly; OR integration is smooth but documentation has errors.
- 3 - Integration of quoted or paraphrased information is sometimes awkward but documented correctly.

- 4 - Quoted or paraphrased information is smoothly integrated into paragraphs and sentences and is documented correctly.

V. Ability to identify and evaluate the relationship between argument and evidence in secondary sources.

n/a - Not Applicable

- 1 - Does not understand the source.
- 2 - Demonstrates a limited understanding of the author's intention and/or makes little or no reference to the evidence used.
- 3 - Articulates the general argument and identifies the evidence used in the source.
- 4 - Shows a sophisticated grasp of the argument of a secondary source and probes the relationship between the argument and the evidence used in the source.

VI. Ability to formulate historical arguments.

n/a - Not Applicable

- 1 - Makes no argument, or makes an argument that is not based in the discipline of history (e.g. an aesthetic one) or that simply reflects the student's opinion.
- 2 - Presents some historical ideas but not a coherent argument.
- 3 - Has a coherent argument.
- 4 - Has a sophisticated argument with a sense of its historical and historiographical significance.

VII. Ability to use evidence effectively to construct a historical interpretation.

n/a - Not Applicable

- 1 - Uses only generalizations, unsupported statements of fact or opinion, or irrelevant examples.
- 2 - Has some relevant examples but also many irrelevant ones; or uses relevant but generalized examples that are underdeveloped or unclear.
- 3 - Has mostly relevant supporting examples with sufficient analysis.
- 4 - Has well developed and consistently relevant supporting examples and/or details that clearly contribute to the construction of a central argument.

VIII. Ability to understand the fundamentals of historiography.

n/a - Not Applicable

- 1 - Provides no evidence that the student understands historiography.
- 2 - Summarizes the content of various works but is unable to establish the relationship between different interpretations.
- 3 - Understands the argument in different works but falls short in weighing the usefulness of different approaches.
- 4 - Has a sophisticated grasp of historiography and relevant historiographical debate.

IX. Ability to engage in research that integrates primary and secondary sources.

n/a - Not Applicable

- 1 - Uses insufficient sources and/or does not distinguish clearly between primary and secondary sources.
- 2 - Uses sufficient primary and secondary sources, but analysis of those sources is inadequate.
- 3 - Engages in adequate analysis of primary and secondary sources but does not clearly express the relationship between primary and secondary research.
- 4 - Engages in sophisticated analysis of both primary and secondary sources.

Appendix 2
History Department Assessment
Senior Questionnaire, March 2008

I. General Questions:

1. What is your area of concentration? Circle one.

The Americas Europe Asia Self-Defined
Concentration _____

2. On average, how many hours per week outside of class did you spend on a history course?

0-3 hours 3-6 hours 6-9 hours 10+ hours

3. Before senior year, how often did you meet with your mentor outside of class?

Less than once a quarter Once a quarter More than once a quarter

II. The Major in General:

1. Majoring in history significantly furthered my intellectual development.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

2. The department offered courses in my areas of interest.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

3. The history department's professors are effective instructors.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

4. The department's mentoring program was valuable in helping me complete the major and the general undergraduate requirements.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

Comments about the major in general:

III. Curriculum:

1. I understand why I was required to take the courses I was required to take.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

2. I understand the different goals of 2000- and 3000-level courses.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

3. I understand the purpose of the World History requirement.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

4. I am knowledgeable in my chosen area of concentration.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

Comments about the curriculum:

IV. The Three Quarter Sequence

1. *[Note: A capstone is designed to integrate and build upon the skills and knowledge acquired that students acquired in their earlier history courses. The capstone should provide a challenging opportunity for students to demonstrate the skills they have learned in their previous coursework.]*

The three-quarter sequence from What is History to Senior Seminar II was an effective capstone.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

2. What is History prepared me well for Senior Seminar.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

3. Senior Seminar I prepared me well for Senior Seminar II.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

4. The class meetings for Senior Seminars I and II were helpful in producing my final thesis.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

5. The mentor meetings were helpful in producing my final thesis.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

Comments about the three-quarter sequence:

V. Skills Development:

1. I know how to define a historical question.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

2. I know how to find secondary sources to contextualize or structure a historical question.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

3. I know how to identify and evaluate the argument, methodology, and evidence of a secondary source.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

4. I know how to find primary sources to address a historical question.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

5. I know how to analyze primary sources to address a historical question.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

6. I am a much better writer because I majored in history.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

7. I understand the differences between the way historians write and the way scholars in other disciplines write.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

8. I am much better at presenting my ideas orally because I majored in history.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

Comments about skills development:

Any other comments about your experience with the major: