Annual Academic Assessment Report Cover Sheet

Assessment reports are due the 1st Wednesday after the Fall Term

Email to: assessment@unlv.edu

Program Information:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Program Assessed</th>
<th>MA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department</td>
<td>History</td>
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<td>College</td>
<td>Liberal Arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department Chair</td>
<td>Paul Werth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment Coordinator</td>
<td>Elspeth Whitney</td>
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<td>Date Submitted</td>
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</table>

Contact Person for This Report

| Name                | Elspeth Whitney        |
| Phone               | 702 875-4420           |
| Email               | elspeth@unlv.nevada.edu|

Please attach a narrative (not to exceed 4 pages, excluding appendices) addressing the following:

- What are the student learning outcomes? Please provide a numbered list.
- Which learning outcomes were assessed?
- How were they assessed? (Programs must use at least one direct assessment of student learning.)
- Undergraduate programs should assess at least one University Undergraduate Learning Outcome (UULO) each year, which may or may not overlap with a program learning outcome.
- Graduate programs should assess at least one outcome related to one of the following graduate level requirements each year:
  - student engagement in research, scholarship, creative expression and/or appropriate high-level professional practice.
  - activities requiring originality, critical analysis and expertise.
  - the development of extensive knowledge in the field under study.
- What was learned from the assessment results?
- How did the program respond to what was learned?

Please limit the narrative portion of your report to no more than four pages. You may attach appendices with data, tables, charts, or other materials as needed. Please explain the relevant conclusions from any appendices in your narrative. Please contact the Office of Academic Assessment if you have questions or need assistance.

History Department MA Program Assessment Report 2015

1. STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES
Upon completion of the M.A. program in History, students should be able to:

1. Demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of the content and historiography of an extensive body of scholarly material in a major field defined by historical period, geographic region or regions, or theme, e.g. History and Memory.

2. Demonstrate knowledge of the content and historiography of an extensive body of scholarly material in a minor field defined by historical period, geographic region or regions, or theme, e.g. History and Memory.

3. Demonstrate an awareness of the role of historians in the construction of the past and the role of contemporary context in shaping the perspectives of historians.

4. Demonstrate the ability to formulate an original research project, identify pertinent sources, examine those sources thoroughly, efficiently, and even-handedly within the context of the existing scholarly literature in the field and construct a well-ordered, well-argued and well-written paper of substantial length.

2. The MA Program was qualitatively assessed over the past year as part of the ongoing work of the Department Graduate Committee (chaired by Dr. Elizabeth Nelson, our Graduate Coordinator) in conjunction with the writing of a new Strategic Plan, a collaborative effort under the leadership of Dr. Greg Hise. The Strategic Plan highlighted the importance of our Public History program as a minor for students in the MA program. The department established its graduate Public History program in 1999; since then it has become one of the top ranked programs in the U.S. It won the National Council on Public History’s highest award, the Outstanding Public History Project Prize in 2010, and its programmatic research has been featured in the top academic journals and a wide range of media including the New York Times, L.A. Times and Washington Post. Eventually encompassing such areas as historic preservation, the history of public lands, oral history, and material culture, the public history addition complemented nationally recognized strengths in the linked fields of U.S. West and environmental history. The department has five faculty members working in the area of U.S. West and two environmental historians. UNLV’s public history program is more explicitly integrated with concentrations in U.S. West and environment than any of the other top programs in the region and is on a par with the best programs in the nation. The systematic linking of complementary strengths in west-environment-public was noted by program reviewers as one of the great strengths of our graduate program. UNLV’s public history program is also the only graduate program in the U.S. with the official “Statewide Cultural Preservation Organization” housed within a history department. Preserve Nevada was awarded the Las Vegas Historic Preservation Award in 2011 for advocacy on behalf of the entire state and was nominated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as a full member of the National Partner Working Group. The program has generated more than $2 million dollars in sponsored projects and is considered one of the top three Land Management Agency Cooperative Ecosystems-Studies Unit (CESU) partners in the American West. The program’s director has presented to the US Senate and regularly advises other institutions on program building and sponsored project issues.
3. The Department’s MA students have continued to distinguish themselves outside the Department. One MA student, Catherine Wisnowsky, was selected as the recipient of award for Best Thesis in the History Department and in the College of Liberal Arts. She is the nominee from the College of Liberal Arts for the UNLV Outstanding Thesis Award. Ms. Wisnowsky is currently enrolled in the doctoral program in History at the University of Illinois, Urbana/Champaign. She received a generous fellowship for her doctoral studies from the University of Illinois. Another MA student, Renee Langlois, presented a paper, at the Royal Studies Network Conference, an international professional conference, in Lisbon in June 2015 and was invited to contribute to an edited book project on royal queens.

4. **MA theses.** The History Department has begun to encourage students, at both the M.A. and Ph.D. level to use the seminar as an opportunity to develop a topic that could lead to a thesis or dissertation. The success of Ms. Wisnowsky’s seminar paper, which she presented at several conferences, and the excellence of her award-winning thesis suggest that encouraging seminar students to follow this path should be continued in the future. Ms. Langlois also used a seminar paper as the basis of a talk presented at a professional conference and is in the process of writing a thesis on the same topic. Two students completed theses in 2015. One of these won the College of Liberal Arts Award for Best MA Thesis (see above). Although the overall number of students writing theses is down, the quality of the completed theses has risen. The graduate committee has been discussing the guidelines for thesis length and scope and plans to explore the possibility of adding a Professional Paper option for students who do not plan to apply to PhD programs.

5. **Direct Assessment.** Assessment will focus on SLO 1, 2 and 3 through review of performance on comprehensive exams. The Assessment Officer, in conjunction with the MA Program Coordinator and the Graduate Committee, will review comprehensive exams over the past two years using a series of rubrics. Overall, the department continues to work on improving student performance on MA comprehensive exams. Although students typically pass their exams, faculty continue to find many of the performances disappointing.

A review of the assessment of comprehensive exams from Fall 2014 through Spring 2015 shows the following:

- a) students are doing a good job of preparing for the exams
- b) students are doing well on the historiography component of the exam
- c) students are doing well on using critical thinking in their essays
- d) students could improve their performance on the “knowledge of the content” of a body of scholarly material component of the exam.

**Results.** A table of results appears in Appendix #1. Faculty assess student performance on comprehensive exams both quantitatively and qualitatively (a blank form is included in Appendix #2). Contrary to faculty expectations, a
A significant number of students are doing better according to both forms of assessment on the "historiography" component of the exam than on the "historical knowledge" component of the exam. Quantitatively, six students did better on the "historiographical" component, while four students did better on the "historical knowledge" component. Two students did equally well in both categories. Faculty comments in eleven cases indicate some dissatisfaction with the level of historical knowledge and/or expressed more enthusiasm for the historiographical aspect of the essay. Sample comments include:

“The essay could have demonstrated a stronger command of the relevant and significant historical events, such as the Birmingham Bus Boycott, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.”

“The essay did not include much historical detail but rather focused on the issue of historiography.”

“There are still some crucial errors and problematic explanations popping up here and there. For example, characterizing the `Abbasid ninth century as entirely prosperous ignores the economic breakdowns caused by agricultural decline in the second half of the ninth century, which sparked events like the Zanj Revolt and the Qarmatian uprisings. Also, there seems to be some confusion about how to examine the period from the end of the Saljuqs up to the rise of the Ottomans.”

The most common complaint about

This result is somewhat surprising as faculty generally consider a knowledge of historiography as a more intellectually demanding task than mastery of historical content. The results may indicate that faculty are emphasizing historiography to students preparing for the exam and in exam questions while assuming that students will master content more on their own. Or it may indicate that students do not realize that answers should integrate historiography and historical content. It may also indicate a mismatch between the courses students take and the questions on the exam. Taking these results into account, the Graduate Committee is exploring ways to link the curriculum and the exams more closely and to improve faculty-student communication about exam expectations.

# 4 251 DIRECT ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT PAPERS

1. Use of new rubric.
2. Random sampling of papers.

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MA Comp exams and Student Learning Objectives

1. Demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of the content and historiography of an extensive body of scholarly material in a major field defined by historical period, geographic region or regions, or theme, e.g. History and Memory.
2. Demonstrate knowledge of the content and historiography of an extensive body of scholarly material in a minor field defined by historical period, geographic region or regions, or theme, e.g. History and Memory.
3. Demonstrate an awareness of the role of historians in the construction of the past and the role of contemporary context in shaping the perspectives of historians.

Scores are for the exam answer to the 2 questions in the primary field of the student

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Student #</th>
<th>1 preparation out of 5</th>
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<th>3 historiography out of 5</th>
<th>4c. critical thinking out of 1</th>
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History Department Assessment of M.A. Exams

Student: _______________________ Examiner: _______________________
☐ Thesis ☐ Non-thesis
Semester: _______________________ Date: _______________________

Instructions:

• Each Member of the Committee should rank the student’s performance ONLY in
  the FIELD(S) FOR WHICH THEY ARE THE PRIMARY EXAMINER.

• Members of the Committee other than the Graduate College Representative
  should send by e-mail completed forms to the Chair of the Committee within
  three days after the date of the exam.

• Please provide written comments for the student in the section below. If an
  examiner wants to provide separate comments for the members of the committee,
  those comments should go in the section below the comments for the student.

• The Chair should e-mail the completed forms to the Graduate College
  Representative as soon as they are received from the Members of the Committee.

• The Graduate College Representative should read the test with the assessment
  sheets to make sure the scores fall within a reasonable range based on the
  student’s performance (see below). The Graduate College Representative may fill
  out the form and/or add comments in the comment section below as they wish.
  The Graduate College Representative should return his or her assessment to the
  Chair by e-mail within two days of receiving the materials.

• The Chair should return all completed forms to Therese for placement in the
  Department’s Assessment files.

• It is the responsibility of the Chair to ensure that the Graduate College
  Representative receives the exam and the filled-out assessment forms in a timely
  manner. It is also the responsibility of the Chair to make sure that all forms are
  returned to Therese for placement in the History Department Assessment files.

Graduate College Representative: Do the scores fall within a reasonable range based on
the student’s performance?

Please give one point (or fraction) for each “yes” answer to the questions below.

1. Assess the students preparation for the exam
   ____ Did the student finalize the lists in timely fashion?
   ____ Did the student meet regularly with you during the period of preparation?
1. Preparation

___Did the student create organized study materials for the exam?
___Did the student’s comprehension of the material improve over the period of preparation?
___Was the student’s performance exceptional?

Score:_____

2. Historical Knowledge

___Did the student demonstrate mastery of historical chronology?
___Did the student demonstrate detailed knowledge of historical actors and events?
___Did the student demonstrate mastery of historical narrative?
___Did the student demonstrate mastery of the methods of historical analysis (change over time, cause and effect, etc)
___Was the student’s performance exceptional?

Score:_____

3. Historiography

___Did the student use a significant number of the books and articles on his/her list?
___Did the student demonstrate mastery of the major historiographical schools of thought?
___Did the student demonstrate the development of historical thinking on the topic of the question?
___Did the student provide accurate bibliographic references (author, title, year of publication)
___Was the student’s performance exceptional?

Score:_____

4. Writing and Analysis

___Was the length of the essay sufficient to answer the question in detail?
___Was the writing clearly organized and grammatically correct?
___Did the student use critical thinking in addressing the question?
___Was the essay more than an annotated bibliography; did the student offer analysis of the chosen works?
___Was the student’s performance exceptional?

Score:_____

Total: _____

18-20 -- Honors
16-18 -- High Pass
10-16 -- Pass
9 or below -- Fail

Comments for Student:

Preparation:
Historical Knowledge:

Historiographical Knowledge:

Writing and Analysis:

Comments for Committee Members: