Annual Academic Assessment Report Cover Sheet

Assessment reports are due the 1st Wednesday after the Fall Term
Email to: assessment@unlv.edu

Program Information:

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<tr>
<th>Program Assessed</th>
<th>M.A.</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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<tr>
<td>Date Submitted</td>
<td>Jan. 29, 2017</td>
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Contact Person for This Report

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<thead>
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<th>Name</th>
<th>Elspeth Whitney</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>702 875-4420</td>
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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.
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.

2016 Assessment will focus on SLO 1-4 through direct assessment and review of completed master’s theses over the past three years following a slightly revised plan as outlined in 2014 - 2015. Two theses chosen were reviewed out of a total of four completed (the remaining two were unavailable). The titles of the completed theses are attached in Appendix 1.

DIRECT ASSESSMENT

The dissertations were assessed through a rubric adapted from that developed by the American Historical Association for capstone courses (attached Appendix 2). The categories of the AHA rubric largely overlaps with the SLOs #1-4.

Review of theses written over the past three years shows that the History Department is doing a very good to excellent job of producing Master’s students who write theses that contribute to scholarship on a narrowly focused topic in the field of History. All theses were rated from very good (4+) to excellent (5) on the AHA rubrics.

Catherine Wisnosky, author of one of the theses reviewed, received the award for Best Thesis in the College of Liberal Arts and was 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/Champagne. She received a generous fellowship for her doctoral studies from the University of Illinois.

It should be noted that only Master’s students who both exhibit exceptional research, analytic and writing skills and have adequate resources to complete a thesis in a timely fashion are encouraged to write a thesis. Students currently can choose between a thesis track or a non-thesis track for their M.A. program. Thesis track students must submit a
research prospectus for the thesis that includes a discussion of the significance of the topic and positions it in the relevant historiography, a summary of the archives or other primary sources that will be used, and an outline of the chapters with a brief discussion of each chapter and must pass an oral defense of the completed thesis. Non-thesis students must successfully complete an additional written examination in their minor areas of study in lieu of writing a thesis. Over the past three years, four M.A. students wrote a thesis, while sixteen chose the non-thesis track.

The History Department has begun to encourage students, at the M.A. 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. The overall number of students writing theses is down, but 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.

Three further observations emerged from the assessment process.

1) The theses reviewed demonstrated a high level of research skills using a wide variety of primary sources, including manuscripts, newspapers, oral interviews, and local, state and federal government reports, as well as other texts, and secondary sources. All demonstrated an excellent ability to construct an historical narrative and explain the historiographical and historical context; all provided a clear rationale for the topic and approach; and all linked evidence and interpretation in a convincing and solid manner. All were well written. Theses overall received slightly higher ratings on rubrics #1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 than on rubric #2 but all achieved an average of at least a 4 and two had an average of 5.

2) There was room for improvement in two respects. One, more attention might be paid to the conclusion of the thesis. Outside readers are likely to read the introduction and the conclusion before reading the entire thesis. Therefore, special attention should be paid to ensuring that the conclusion is as substantive and clear as possible and is more than an epilogue. In the theses under review, neither had a clear conclusion, separate from the end of the last chapter. Secondly, more attention should be paid to the Abstract. Many more readers will read the Abstract than the entire thesis. The review showed that, in at least these cases, the Abstracts did not represent the focus, approach and conclusions of the thesis in the most effective way. In one case, the Abstract was overly long and rambling; in the other case, the Abstract was clear and to the point but contained an obvious typo; the thesis itself, on the other hand, was impeccably written. More attention should be paid to ensuring that the Abstract is as effective as the thesis itself in demonstrating the research, scholarly and writing accomplishments of the author.
It needs to be remembered that writing a thesis is a demanding task and requires a major commitment from both the student and the faculty on the student’s Committee. The effort and time put into shepherding M.A. students through the process of writing a thesis by both individual faculty members and the Department as a whole should be recognized and rewarded.

The findings will be reviewed by the entire faculty of the Department, with special attention by the Graduate Committee. The Graduate Committee will consider whether changes below the level of program change are indicated and present their findings to the department as a whole during a Faculty meeting for consideration.

PROGRAM CHANGE

One new program change was implemented. M.A. students must now all take their comprehensive exams during one week during the Fall semester and one week during the Spring semester. This change was implemented to ensure greater coherence in the program and eliminate stress on the part of students, faculty and administrative staff in scheduling multiple times for taking exams spread out over the entire semester.
APPENDIX 1


AHA History Tuning Project: History Discipline Core

History is a set of evolving rules and tools that allows us to interpret the past with clarity, rigor, and an appreciation for interpretative debate. It requires evidence, sophisticated use of information, and a deliberative stance to explain change and continuity over time. As a profoundly public pursuit, history is essential to active and empathetic citizenship and requires effective communication to make the past accessible to multiple audiences. As a discipline, history entails a set of professional ethics and standards that demand peer review, citation, and tolerance for the provisional nature of knowledge.

Core competencies are numbered and learning outcomes are listed as bullet points below.

**History students can:**

1. **Engage in historical inquiry, research, and analysis.**
   - Develop a disciplined, skeptical stance and outlook on the world that demands evidence and sophisticated use of information.
   - Understand the dynamics of change over time.
   - Explore the complexity of the human experience, across time and space.
   - Evaluate a variety of historical sources for their credibility, position, and perspective.
   - Read and contextualize materials from the past with appropriate precision and detail.

2. **Practice historical empathy.**
   - Value the study of the past for its contribution to lifelong learning and critical habits of mind that are essential for effective and engaged citizenship.
   - Develop a body of historical knowledge with range and depth.
   - Recognize the ongoing provisional nature of knowledge.
   - Interpret the past in context; contextualize the past on its own terms.
   - Explore multiple historical and theoretical viewpoints that provide perspective on the past.
   - Recognize where they are in history.

3. **Understand the complex nature of the historical record.**
   - Distinguish between primary and secondary materials and decide when to use each.
   - Choose among multiple tools, methods, and perspectives to investigate and interpret materials from the past.
   - Recognize the value of conflicting narratives and evidence.

4. **Generate significant, open-ended questions about the past and devise research strategies to answer them.**
   - Seek a variety of sources that provide evidence to support an argument about the past.
   - Develop a methodological practice of gathering, sifting, analyzing, ordering, synthesizing, and interpreting evidence.
   - Identify and summarize other scholars' historical arguments.

5. **Craft historical narrative and argument.**
   - Generate a historical argument that is reasoned and based on historical evidence selected, arranged, and analyzed.
   - Write effective narrative that describes and analyzes the past for its use in the present.
   - Understand that the ethics and practice of history mean recognizing and building on other scholars' work, peer review, and citation.
   - Defend a position publicly and revise this position when new evidence requires it.
6. Practice historical thinking as central to engaged citizenship.
   - Engage a diversity of viewpoints in a civil and constructive fashion.
   - Work cooperatively with others to develop positions that reflect deliberation and differing perspectives.
   - Apply historical knowledge and analysis to contribute to contemporary social dialogue.

Sample Tasks for Demonstrating Competencies: This broad list is intended to give instructors, programs, and departments a wide range of items through which the competencies above might be demonstrated.
   - Describe your own position in history in written, oral, or other forms.
   - Generate class discussion questions from primary and secondary sources.
   - Engage the ideas of others constructively in oral or written conversation/dialogue/discussion.
   - Explain in written or oral presentation the difference between primary and secondary sources.
   - Explain in written or oral presentation the different perspectives (such as author, audience, and agenda) between two or more primary sources.
   - Explain in written or oral presentation the different perspectives (such as author, audience, and agenda) between two or more secondary sources.
   - Demonstrate how various sources may be synthesized.
   - Find appropriate materials online, in a library, or in the community and know how to cite them.
   - Demonstrate the relationship between primary and secondary materials by assessing a historian's work and recognizing the tools used to construct that historical argument.
   - Contextualize a source; demonstrate in written or oral presentation what historical detail a source needs to be understood.
   - Narrate, in written or oral presentation, an event from the past.
   - Present and analyze, in written or oral presentation, different perspectives on an event from the past.
   - Have a transcript that shows courses whose content ranges over time, space, culture, and methods.
   - Use specific primary and secondary sources in examinations, discussions, and oral presentations.
   - Select appropriate primary source(s) as evidence.
   - Select appropriate secondary source(s) as evidence or in support of a position or argument.
   - Identify existing and compelling questions about the subject.
   - Pose appropriate research questions and assess the range of materials necessary to answer them.
   - Write a proposal for the development of a work of history in any medium.
   - Identify and cite sources and points of evidence appropriate in number and type for exercises such as an annotated bibliography, paper proposals, a semester paper, or a capstone exercise.
   - Write a successful capstone research paper with appropriate citations.
   - Participate in internship and/or field experience, and also the creation of an e-portfolio/blog/website that demonstrates the creation of a historical narrative and an argument for public use.
   - Complete a substantial historical project autonomously.
# History Capstone Rubric

This rubric has been modified by John Williams and Jane Murphy.

## Argument

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<tr>
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<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rationale/Motivation</td>
<td>No clear rationale or a weak rationale for the project</td>
<td>Some rationale presented, begins to motivate the work</td>
<td>Provides and discusses a suitable rationale</td>
<td>Persuasive and creative rationale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope/Dealing with Complexity in Framing a Topic</td>
<td>Frames complex questions as simple ones</td>
<td>Invests questions with some complexity; may oversimplify or overextend</td>
<td>Reasonable balance between focus and complexity</td>
<td>Frames the topic with a full appreciation of its complexity while retaining appropriate focus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Approach</td>
<td>Not clear what was done or why, or an inappropriate method</td>
<td>Approach is generally appropriate and properly executed</td>
<td>Well chosen and appropriate, and well executed</td>
<td>Creative and sophisticated methods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Historiographic/Theoretical Context</td>
<td>Author does not demonstrate awareness of the scholarly literature, may over rely on too few sources</td>
<td>Author demonstrates a reasonable awareness of the literature</td>
<td>Author demonstrates broad awareness and situates own work within the literature</td>
<td>Author is aware of scholarly literature, situates own work within the field, and makes a contribution to the field, or identifies a new direction for investigation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Position/Thesis</td>
<td>Does not take a clear or defensible position or draw a clear conclusion</td>
<td>States and/or critiques a position that may already exist in the literature</td>
<td>Thoroughly and effectively supports, tests, extends, or critiques a position that may already exist in the literature</td>
<td>Develops a clear and defensible position of his/her own; draws a significant conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argumentation</td>
<td>Weak, invalid, or no argument, perhaps a simple assertion</td>
<td>Some arguments valid and well supported, some not</td>
<td>Main arguments valid, systematic, and well supported</td>
<td>Arguments both well supported and in conversation with conflicting explanations</td>
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## Sources/Research

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<th>Level 1</th>
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<th>Level 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Sources located too few or inappropriate for stated project</td>
<td>Sources located of reasonable range, but may be limited in number or kind</td>
<td>Source base wide ranging and thorough; demonstrates effective use of bibliographic tools</td>
<td>Source base complex and extensive, and compiled using creative and sophisticated methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection</td>
<td>Selected sources inappropriate for investigation of stated problem</td>
<td>Some sources address stated problem but others are inappropriate; source base may lack key or relevant sources</td>
<td>Sources selected are appropriately relevant and extensive enough to allow exploration of stated problem</td>
<td>Creative and sophisticated source selection that brings new sources to bear on question, or brings new questions to better-known sources</td>
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<td>Analysis and Interpretation</td>
<td>Draws on little or no evidence, treats related evidence as unrelated, or draws weak or simplistic connections</td>
<td>Some appropriate use of evidence, but uneven; begins to establish connections and implications of source material</td>
<td>Feasible evidence appropriately selected and not overinterpreted; brings together related sources in productive ways; thoroughly discusses implications of sources</td>
<td>Fully exploits the richness of the sources and is sufficiently persuasive in analysis; develops insightful connections and patterns that require intellectual creativity</td>
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**Writing Mechanics**

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<th>Level 1</th>
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<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grammar and Spelling, Usage</strong></td>
<td>Significantly impairs readability</td>
<td>Frequent or serious errors</td>
<td>Some minor errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
<td>Needs significant improvement</td>
<td>Structure is of inconsistent quality; may be choppy and/or have redundancies or disconnections</td>
<td>Structure supports the argument; clearly ordered sections fit together well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clarity, Style, Readability (as Appropriate to Genre and Discipline)</strong></td>
<td>Gets in the way of reading for content</td>
<td>Beginning to be comfortable with appropriate conventions, though style is inconsistent or uneven</td>
<td>Effective prose style; follows relevant scholarly conventions; emergence of voice</td>
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