

General Education Assessment Narrative  
Department of History

**Goals and Objectives**

Learning Objective: Demonstrates awareness of diverse historical and cultural perspectives and their significance in the past or for the present.

Competency: Ability to compare and contrast different perspectives in either primary sources or secondary sources, demonstrated by the following:

- 1) identify a historical source as either a primary or secondary source
- 2) recognize that a primary source has an author with a perspective
- 3) infer how the perspective or life circumstances of the author might influence the content of the source

Expectations: We expect the General Education students may struggle with each of these competencies, as faculty have identified these skills to be lacking even among upper-level students within our major.

**Measures and Criterion**

Assessment Tool:

The department generated two versions of a skills-based standardized exam that required no prior knowledge of historical content. On the exam, students had to read an excerpt from a primary source and then answer three multiple choice questions. Question 1 corresponded to competency 1; questions 2 and 3 corresponded to competency 2. We distributed the exams to all instructors of HIST 100, 101, 102, 221, and 222 at the beginning of the Spring 2018 semester. We asked that instructors of these classes distribute one version of the quiz to all sections of these classes at the end of the semester. There was no identifying information on the quizzes; students and instructors remained anonymous. The assessment coordinator then graded a random sample of the submitted quizzes, approximately 10% of each version.

Threshold of Success:

We set a goal of an 80% pass rate, with “passing” equivalent to receiving 65% on the exam (2 out of 3 questions correct).

**Findings:**

In total, we collected 715 completed assessments, from 10 sections of the 29 total sections taught. We also received and mistakenly included assessments from 2 sections of honors-level History courses. Although the honors-level courses could potentially skew results, the low enrollment numbers for honors classes makes this a fairly negligible (maximum 5.5% of all submitted assessments, likely less) factor. Overall, the low completion rate could be due to poor communication of expectations to all instructors in the History department, especially to contingent faculty; instructors lacking the time to complete the assessments in class; students dropping out of or not attending class the day of the assessment.

We were just short of our 80% pass rate. 78.9% of the students passed by answering 2 out of the 3 questions correctly.

70% of students passed the first competency of “identify a historical source as either a primary or secondary source.”

77.5% of students passed the second competency of “infer how the perspective or life circumstances of the author might influence the content of the source”

### **Improvement Narrative:**

Students struggled most with the first competency of “identify a historical source as either a primary or secondary source.” We first assumed that this would be the most accessible competency. However, upon reflection, the low success rate for this competency is consistent with previous departmental assessments of our B.A. students, who have also struggled with this skill. Going forward, we may need to provide better guidance and training for all of our General Education instructors to teach the difference between primary and secondary sources in their classes. However, this competency might be more advanced than we have assumed. We included an ungraded question on the quiz so that students could qualitatively explain why they thought the provided source was primary or secondary. Many of these answers correctly defined a primary source and provided logical reasons for their choice (even if the choice was incorrect). In future, we might adjust this competency to the appropriate level so that instead of “identify a source as either primary or secondary,” it might be “correctly define ‘primary source’ and ‘secondary source.’”

77.5% of students passed the third competency of “infer how the perspective or life circumstances of the author might influence the content of the source.” Upon reflection, the assessment tool might be misaligned. There were two multiple choice questions designed to measure this competency, but upon reflection, one might have been measuring general reading comprehension skills.

In order to streamline the assessment process and to encourage higher completion rates, we will discuss asking General Education instructors to assess just one rather than all of their General Education courses. For instructors who teach two or more General Education classes, this could save valuable instruction time. This could also streamline the process for the assessment committee, so that we are not collecting thousands of assessments when we are only grading a small random sample. We might also consider assessing a rotating sample of our General Educations instead of all of them at once.

Overall, the results of the General Education Assessment have highlighted the opportunity to create more clear and measurable learning objectives for the entire department, and to communicate these more effectively to all of our instructors, whether continuing or contingent.

Going forward, we plan the following:

Fall 2018:

We will assess General Education courses for the Fall 2018 semester, for now using the same competencies and assessment tools as the 2018-2018 cycle with only minor adjustments in the tool and the process for clarity. One major change that we will implement is that we will require each instructor to assess just one rather than all of their general education courses.

#### Spring 2019

In Spring 2019, we will plan a more robust revision of the assessment tool and process, emphasizing improved communication with faculty. We plan the following timeline:

- 1) September 2018: share the results and narrative with the department
- 2) October 2018: revisit and revise the stated competencies (not the official learning objectives). Develop a more streamlined process of completing and submitting assessments
- 3) November 2018: Adjust the assessment tool to align with the competencies
- 4) December 2018: Clearly communicate the new learning objectives, assessment process, and assessment tool, to all faculty via email, moodle, or in-person/virtual meetings well before the beginning of the Spring 2019 semester