

Appendix H - General Education Assessment – Department of History

The general education component determines a significant proportion of the department’s responsibilities. As shown in Table I, the student credit hour production of the seven general education courses offered by the department (HIST 1010, 1020, 1110, 1120, and 1310 in the Humanities/Fine Arts category; HIST 2010 and 2020 in the History category) remains dramatically high and presents numerous challenges to scheduling and staffing.

**Table I
GENERAL EDUCATION HISTORY COURSES
Student Credit Hour Production
2012-2013 Academic Year**

| Gen Ed Category/courses | Fall 2012 | Spring 2013 |
|--------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| HISTORY | | |
| HIST 2010 | 2154 | 1806 |
| HIST 2020 | 1680 | 2043 |
| HUMANITIES/FINE ARTS | | |
| HIST 1010 | 351 | |
| HIST 1020 | | 258 |
| HIST 1110 | | 237 |
| HIST 1120 | 144 | |
| HIST 1310 | 240 | 237 |

The very large student enrollment in HIST 2010-2020 reflects the campus requirement for most students to complete two semesters of U.S. history to satisfy the History component of the General Education core curriculum. The other five courses contribute to the Humanities/Fine Arts component of this curriculum by presenting traditional western civilization and world history content or, in the case of HIST 1310, a history of science overview that includes non-western as well as western content. These courses are consistently oversubscribed by students.

Each general education course is designed around the learning outcomes mandated by the Tennessee Board of Regents and coordinated by the campus General Education Committee (the history department representative to this committee plays an important role). A summary of these outcomes follows:

Humanities/Fine Arts (HIST 1010, 1020, 1110, 1120, 1310)

1. Analyze significant primary texts and works of art, ancient, pre-modern, and modern, as forms of cultural and creative expression.
2. Explain the ways in which humanistic and/or artistic expression throughout the ages expresses the culture and values of its time and place.
3. Explore global/cultural diversity.
4. Frame a comparative context through which they [students] can critically assess the ideas, forces, and values that have created the modern world.
5. Recognize the ways in which both change and continuity have affected human history.
6. Practice the critical and analytical methodologies of the Humanities and/or Fine Arts.

History (HIST 2010, 2020)

1. Analyze historical facts and interpretations.
2. Analyze and compare political, geographic, economic, social, cultural, religious and intellectual institutions, structures, and processes across a range of historical periods and cultures.
3. Recognize and articulate the diversity of human experience across a range of historical periods and the complexities of a global culture and society.

4. Draw on historical perspective to evaluate contemporary problems/issues.
5. Analyze the contributions of past cultures/societies to the contemporary world.

Assessment Activity, 2013-2014

During the 2013-2014 academic year, the history department pursued a structured program of general education assessment to augment the faculty's continuing individual assessment of course effectiveness. This program focused heavily on the outcomes above as an addition to existing assessment based on students' mastery of the content of general education courses. Because history is a content-oriented discipline, the integration of outcomes and content remains essential. Indeed, the presentation of content in an appropriate fashion leads to the achievement of the outcomes listed above. Thus, outcomes are a **result** of effective teaching that focuses on historical content and not an end in themselves. The department has long made use of the pre-test/post-test technique to chart students' acquisition of historical knowledge. Information from such tests, when added to a careful consideration of general education outcomes, provides valuable insight concerning potential modifications to existing teaching activity.

The assessment program began during the fall of 2013 with the development of a schedule of appropriate activities. This schedule gained the approval of the faculty at an early department meeting and is reprinted here:

FALL 2013

1. Collection and organization of relevant data

This will include data concerning enrollment in General Education courses for the 2012-2013 academic year and the results of the faculty survey concerning General Education courses (outcomes, assessment of student performance, teaching strategies, etc.), completed during the summer of 2013.

2. Distribution of data to full-time faculty

3. Discussion among faculty of survey results and other relevant data

In addition to survey results, data would include appropriate pre-test/post-test information. Such data will provide the department with the ability to evaluate activities at both the content level and at the level of outcomes assessment. In this manner, faculty will be able to retain their emphasis on course content, while evaluating success in achieving mandated outcomes.

4. Development of appropriate modifications to existing class activities

This activity would be most effective if these modifications were applied to selected courses only. In this way, other courses would serve as controls for later analysis and would also offer the opportunity for continuous monitoring of General Education courses in the future.

SPRING 2014

1. Implementation of selected modified practices in selected classes

In addition to integrating these new practices into existing class activities, faculty will develop appropriate analytical tools to generate data of use in the evaluation of these practices. In terms of content delivery, the existing pre-test/post-test regimen remains the most obvious and effective method. In terms of outcomes assessment, faculty will require greater flexibility to develop course-specific analytical frameworks.

2. Analysis of impact of modifications

Again, this analysis will require separate activities for content and outcomes assessment. It will probably be most effective to develop separate analyses for those courses listed under the History general education category and those listed under the Humanities/Fine Arts category.

3. Discussion among faculty of possible further modifications and implementation

As an initial effort toward this end, faculty in each of the two general education categories will discuss among themselves the results of the various modifications introduced during the semester. It may be advisable at some point for the faculty as a whole to examine these results, as it is conceivable that new practices in the Humanities/Fine Arts General Education courses could be applied to courses in the History category and vice versa.

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Results of the initial general education survey were available by early September 2013 and were distributed to faculty. These results revealed much of interest and were summarized in the report reprinted below:

Full-time history faculty responded to a survey of required General Education outcomes prepared by the university's general education chair. The following results indicate the relative importance of these outcomes to the class activities of these faculty.

HUMANITIES/FINE ARTS (HIST 1010, 1020, 1110, 1120, 1310)

Instructors teaching these courses generally accept the exploration of global/cultural diversity as the most important of the General Education outcomes. All five courses address transnational topics toward this end and examine various cultures within the geographic and chronological framework of the courses.

Of slightly less significance, although nonetheless identified as relevant, were those outcomes that "Explain the ways in which humanistic and/or artistic expression throughout the ages expresses the culture and values of its time and place" and "Recognize the ways in which both change and continuity have affected human history." The latter of these outcomes is, of course, central to all historical study. Because all of these courses examine music, art, and literature, students in these history courses gain an exceptionally broad appreciation of the cultural component of history.

Although the remaining two goals are seen as less significant still, there is agreement among the faculty that each remains relevant. The practice of the critical and analytical methodologies of the humanities and fine arts would only be possible at the expense of the content of these courses, which the faculty agree must remain the primary focus. The analysis of significant primary texts and works of art, although accomplished in several of these courses, is likewise of secondary importance.

HISTORY (HIST 2010, 2020)

Faculty indicated a consensus that the most important outcome was to provide students with the ability to "Analyze historical facts and interpretations." This outcome was followed closely by two others, each of which received equal support: (1) "Analyze and compare political, geographic, economic, social, cultural, religious and intellectual institutions, structures, and processes across a range of historical periods and cultures," and (2) "Draw on historical perspective to evaluate contemporary problems/issues."

Of significantly less importance were the outcomes designed to enable students to "Recognize and articulate the diversity of human experience across a range of historical periods and the complexities of a global culture and society," and to "Analyze the contributions of past cultures/societies to the contemporary world."

Obviously, a course that traces chiefly the history of one nation is unlikely to be able to focus on "world" concepts.

Faculty also submitted individual comments concerning General Education outcomes and assessment, as well as the underlying concepts of such history courses. A summary of these comments follows.

HUMANITIES/FINE ARTS (HIST 1010, 1020, 1110, 1120, 1310)

History remains a content oriented discipline. Although outcomes such as those mandated are valuable results of quality teaching, they must not be elevated above the content of a specific history course. The mastery of material, through the use of various study methods, must remain the overarching goal of historical instruction. Instructors of these courses continuously monitor students' achievement of this mastery through examinations, but also gauge students' success through carefully constructed pre-tests and post-tests to measure the extent of knowledge gained by students. The results of these tests provide instructors with valuable insight concerning their own success and lead to modifications in course structure or teaching methods as appropriate.

Additional specific outcomes, however, were suggested by individual instructors. The ability to understand broad themes in relation to historic movements was an important outcome for the world history sequence (HIST 1110/1120), as was the exploration of the connections between students' own lives and those of different time periods and cultures. Uniquely appropriate for the history of science course (HIST 1310) was the additional outcome of instilling in students the awareness of science as a creative endeavor and as a central aspect of civilization.

HISTORY (HIST 2010, 2020)

The American history courses are no less content oriented than those classified as Humanities/Fine Arts courses. Instructors of these courses make extensive use of the pre-test/post-test analysis described above. Given the large number of students enrolled in these two courses, the data set for HIST 2010/2020 is extensive and provides instructors with valuable information concerning their teaching effectiveness. Additional outcomes for these courses include the establishment of good study skills among students and the awareness of the impact of the American Civil War on the nation's attitudes and perspectives. The latter outcome includes an understanding that many attitudes did not change with the war. An additional set of outcomes was suggested by one faculty member, who emphasizes the multicultural nature of American history. These outcomes parallel several of the mandated General Education outcomes, but are more detailed in their description.

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During October, faculty were encouraged to examine the results of this survey, discuss them with colleagues, and develop possible modifications to their course offerings. A summary of these modifications was prepared and distributed to the faculty during November, after which individual faculty could integrate these new ideas into existing courses as they thought appropriate. The Spring 2014 semester would thus be used to determine if these ideas had merit as additions to existing courses and would serve as the base for future considerations of course modifications.

The summary of proposed modifications distributed to the faculty is included below:

HISTORY (HIST 2010, 2020)

Faculty teaching the American History general education course responded to survey results in interesting and potentially useful ways. Although faculty generally include a multicultural component that allows them to examine global diversity as part of the American experience, a consensus emerged that additional efforts could be attempted. One respondent, who had long emphasized this topic in HIST 2010, suggested that the topic should also be included in HIST 2020. Other responses pointed out the value of a discussion of the different cultural approaches of various colonial powers in the early American history portion of the course as well as the importance of an examination of German and Japanese cultures during the 1920s and 1930s as part of the context of World War II.

Another outcome that attracted much interest was the potential value of linking historical developments to contemporary issues. A discussion of the development of American "democracy" over time, especially the inclusion of previously excluded groups, could provide valuable insight concerning recent debates concerning the status of immigrants. Another suggestion along these lines noted that concepts and even language related to such topics have changed over time, providing a more nuanced discussion of this important issue. The survey results from the Humanities/Fine Arts category suggested to another respondent that the impact of science and technology on the U.S. should be examined more fully. Such topics as the impact of the automobile are usually discussed, but science and technology have played a much larger role in American history, especially during the 20th century, than is often considered.

HUMANITIES/FINE ARTS (HIST 1010, 1020, 1110, 1120, 1310)

The topical diversity of these courses (European civilization, world civilizations, and history of science) provides many opportunities for the interchange of ideas among faculty. The survey generated several ideas for modifications of existing course strategies, although all faculty have integrated the mandated outcomes into their courses from an early date.

The impact of change and continuity on human history, one of the important outcomes, is examined in all courses, but one respondent suggested that this topic could be integrated more fully in the future by exploring multiple cultures. The specific suggested modification was to examine the influence of ancient Egyptian, Chinese and Indian cultures on contemporary American society. This examination would serve as a valuable case study of the specific outcome. The impact of change and continuity is also thoroughly examined in the European civilization courses through an extensive analysis of art, architecture, and ritual as examples of how cultures cope with social and political anxieties. Indeed, the impact of change and continuity on human history

has always been a major concern of historians, making courses in this discipline an obvious component of any general education curriculum.

The suggestion found in the survey results that science was a central component of human history led one faculty member to note that the world civilization courses currently examined science in specific contexts, but that an expansion of this treatment to include the perspectives of different cultures and time periods would be a valuable addition.

The history of science course (HIST 1310) offered two specific proposals for modifications related to the general education outcomes. Although global/cultural diversity remains important for this course as for the other four courses in this category, the instructor noted confusion among students of the place of non-western science in the general development of science. The proposed solution to this difficulty is to make clear that non-western science, while essential to the course theme of the centrality of science in virtually all cultures, was nonetheless usually separate from the developments in Europe that define the emergence and expansion of “modern science.” The understanding of broad themes in relation to historic movements, an additional outcome suggested by faculty in the survey, led this instructor to focus on the theme of institutional centralization as an important component of the course. The course textbook discusses this theme extensively, as do many of the lectures, but it needs to be examined more comprehensively so that students understand the centrality of this development to the advance of science.

An important component of the “global and cultural diversity” outcome was emphasized in another response to the survey. No specific mention of gender is included in the outcome as currently stated. Although members of the campus General Education Committee assumed that gender issues would be included in many courses in the core curriculum, it is important for individual faculty to integrate this central aspect of the historical account into their classes. The European Civilization courses, therefore, will be modified in the future to more completely and directly integrate the experiences of women into the historical narrative. This goal will be accomplished through various means, including additional discussion of labor history, domestic and family history, and legal developments, all of which will benefit from the inclusion of women’s experiences.

PRE-TEST/POST-TEST APPLICATIONS

The content focus of history courses, leading to the achievement of the various outcomes in the General Education curriculum, provides an excellent opportunity to employ the pre-test/post-test tool to assess teaching effectiveness. Members of the faculty have been experimenting with various forms of these tests for the past several years and the majority of them have embraced this concept with enthusiasm. Not only do such tests provide a straightforward measure of “value added” in General Education courses, but the pre-test also helps to identify gaps in students’ existing knowledge.

Several comments concerning this testing activity were included in the survey responses. A common technique was to administer such a test on the first day of class, with the same questions embedded in regular class examinations throughout the semester. Although the record-keeping required for this activity is often time-consuming, the results are easily observed and analyzed. Equally valuable, several faculty administer an essay-based test early in the semester, asking students to identify terms and concepts. These terms and concepts are included in later course examinations, providing faculty with appropriate comparisons. One faculty member proposed basing the initial test on open-ended essay questions (e.g. “What caused the Civil War?”), a technique that would both encourage students to think about complex historical questions and provide faculty with a better sense of students’ existing knowledge base. In this way, topics that are badly misunderstood could be stressed during the course.

Regardless of the specific testing technique employed, the pre-test/post-test concept has much to offer. The revelation of existing knowledge gaps enables faculty to modify course material as needed. Because the course content and outcomes are strongly inter-related, testing how well students understand the material presented (through separate post-tests or embedded questions in class examinations) provides a straightforward evaluation of faculty success in enabling students to master course material and in achieving the goals and outcomes associated with the General Education Core Curriculum.