History and Political Science Department

A. Department Evaluation Report

1. What was the department’s major assessment accomplishment this year?

1) Development of Program Level Assessment Plans and Program Learning Outcomes Matrices for each of the department’s programs.

2) Development of a course level assessment for HIST 112. During autumn 2013, the History and Political Science department discussed and began preparing a Pre- and Post-test for HIST 112: “World History since 1500.” The test format chosen is a 70-question objective answer test, and is given in the first week and again in the last week of class. It was indeed administered in Week 1 of both Day HIST 112 sections.

In late Feb. 2014, Dr Kessel (Dept. Chair) and Dr Karr (instructor of HIST 112 and developer of the Pre/Post-Test) met with members of the Assessment Office and discussed ways to make the test more useful through question-coding and use of D2L for delivery.

3) In order to better assess our program level outcomes in the History program, we began administering the History Assessment Test (HAT) as a pre-test to all students enrolled in HIST 294 in the Day campus in the Fall 2013. This will, over time, create a body of data that will allow us to gauge improvement over the course of the last two years of study in the History major.

4) In American Studies, the department worked to develop a standardized test for a program level assessment of the American Studies degree. The department was awaiting final word on the selection of testing software before uploading the exam.

2. How did this accomplishment impact the department assessment goals?

Development of departmental assessment plans and learning outcomes matrices helped focus our thinking on which courses and at what level (introductory, reinforcing and emphasize) our department’s learning goals are being addressed and envision a roadmap for strengthening our assessment in the future.

The department is on-track to have a useful assessment regime for one of its General Education courses. This will mean that the History program practices assessment of a gateway course as well as its capstone 494 course. In addition, we have created a process to make the HAT data more meaningful and to better assess student learning in their history electives by implementing the HAT pre-test.
Implementing the HAT as a pre-test in HIST 294 will help us to better assess student learning over time, especially in the last two years when students are taking upper level elective courses rather than general education survey courses.

3. How did this accomplishment impact the course assessment goals?

HIST 112: While no formal course-level assessment had existed prior to AY 2013/14, the department feels that over time, the Pre/Post-test may allow faculty to detect areas where existing practices work well, and where improvements are needed. The spring semester is the first semester for course-level assessment, however, and faculty have not yet determined a base-level expectation regarding class-performance expectations. Moreover, the dept. has yet to agree on how best to use an additional assessment tool within HIST 112—the 2 formal essays produced during the course.

4. How was this accomplishment related to last year’s assessment?

HIST 112: There was no formal course-level assessment during AY 2012/13.

HIST 294: The HAT pre-test is a new form of assessment for the program.

HIST 494: While the existing HIST 494 assessment test (HAT) was useful, it was also limited by lack-of-randomization within chronological and geographical content areas. Dr. Compton worked with Ashley Gosseen at Online administration to address that limitation.

5. How will this accomplishment relate to next year’s assessment?

The development of an assessment plan for each program will allow the department to roll out new assessment measures, as well as apply new goals for existing measures as capstone courses are taught. The department will need to develop a rubric to evaluate PADM/POSC 495 senior theses and presentations, for example.

We will continue to use each of the changes in History that were implemented in the 2013-14 academic year. With this foundation of assessment in place, we will be able to focus on assessment practices beyond quantitative data, such as the evaluation of essays in HIST 112 and senior theses in HIST 494. We will also work to implement the HIST 294 HAT pre-test in this course in all venues.

6. Reflecting upon your accomplishments, how would you improve the assessment process?

HIST 112:

- Build assessment around existing assignments and exams.
- Do not produce “tacked-on” extra assessment tools.
- Quandary: that means standardized tests and assignments in order to assure data that is viable across venues. Standardization goes against the grain of professional college instruction, particularly in the liberal arts.
HIST 494:

- The senior thesis an important assessment tool and is required of this course in all venues. Our challenge moving forward will be to ensure that theses produced in all venues meet the same criteria for success.

7. **What is working well and should not change?**

The department feels that the MFT is a useful, albeit imperfect, assessment tool for political science students. The test covers the major fields of political science and provides some basis to compare our students to those of other institutions. Our ability to draw conclusions from the data is limited by the small number of students that take the test. In 2013, only three students from the Day campus took the exam. In 2014, only one student took the exam. Given that the POSC degree will now be offered online, and in light of the proctoring requirements for the MFT, the department will likely not be able to make use of the test in the future.

Assessment of student learning in all the department’s programs through completion of the senior thesis is an important tool for the program.

8. **What was the department’s major assessment hurdle this year?**

Developing reasonable achievement goals for assessment instruments was a hurdle for all disciplines, especially those for instruments that have yet to be developed and implemented. For example, the goal for POSC students was set as “students score at or above the national mean on the MFT”. In 2013, two out of three students scored above the national mean but one low scoring student pulled the average down. In 2014, the single student taking the exam scored above average (65th percentile). Perhaps we need to reformulate our goals in a way that recognizes our frequent small n size.

HIST 494: The HAT administrative process remains somewhat unreliable: Dr. Karr must ask AHE/Online administration to inform him of upcoming HIST 494 offerings across all venues. This resulted in an absence of any HAT results whatsoever during fall 2013. The instructors for those course must each configure them as web-assisted; the HAT must be individually loaded into each course; Dr. Karr must request a test date from each instructor, then go in and set up the HAT around that date, then supply each instructor with a test password. At the end, he must also go into each individual HIST 494 D2L site, retrieve test results, and format them for distribution. It is an inefficient process.

9. **How did this hurdle impact the department assessment goals?**

The MFT assessment goal for POSC was not met in 2013, but was met in 2014.

HIST 494: The HAT is an internal assessment tool, and unlike MFT exams, there is no national norm by which to gauge student success. While we have worked to reconfigure the exam and make it more comparable to the MFT tests in its content and randomization, it is still an inadequate instrument.
Our goal is to see scores on the HAT be at least 10% higher on the post-test in HIST 494 than on the pre-test given in HIST 294. Since the pre-test was offered for the first time in fall 2013, it will take some time to build up data to assess improvement between the pre and post test.

10. **How did this hurdle impact the course assessment goals?**

Developing reasonable achievement goals for the HIST 112 course assessment instrument was a challenge.

11. **How was this hurdle related to last year’s assessment?**

**HIST 494:** The problems associated with faithfully administering the HAT in all HIST 494 classes in all venues restricted our ability to collect full data for this assessment tool.

In 2012, students from the Day campus, two nationwide sites and two sections of online were tested in HIST 494 Historical Research and Methods. The results in the Day campus indicate that our students are scoring approximately 50% correct on this test. Average total scores ranged from 35.53% - 50.28% correct. The small N sizes make it difficult to draw conclusions, but results were fairly consistent across venues, although MO2A was noticeably weaker than the rest. Students across venues had the strongest performance in United States history. In spring 2014, the HAT was administered to six sections of HIST 494 (Day, 2 nationwide and 3 online sections). Scores across venues ranged from 37.8% - 51% correct, with MO2A again the weakest. Day campus students averaged 51%.

12. **How will this hurdle be addressed in next year’s assessment?**

POSC will revise its goals for MFT performance to “60% of students will score at or above the national mean”.

**HIST 494:** Dr. Karr continues to work with the AHE staff to develop a better information flow to facilitate this process.

13. **Reflecting upon the hurdles you faced, how would you improve your assessment process?**

**HIST 112:** In addition to the new process of assessment for HIST 112 we also plan an assessment tool related to writing and analysis through the use of an essay. Determining how to assess this component in all HIST 112 courses across venues will be a challenge, but will also improve our overall assessment. Developing the logistics for applying the objective assessment across venues will also be a challenge. The Assessment Office can help the department determine an appropriate sample of sections to be assessed. A mechanism for informing the department of the location and timing of offered sections and for assessment implementation must be established. Lessons from this process can be applied to future departmental course level assessments.

**HIST 494:** We will continue to work on making the HAT more effective in lieu of a nationally-normed test like the MFT. We are able to generate question-level data for every time this test is administered, which could be analyzed to improve both the test itself as well as the program. In
order to accomplish such a task we will need significant help or input from an expert at using
spreadsheets and filtering through the information.

In addition, we continue to grapple with the need to review the senior theses written in HIST 494
sections across all venues. An adequate review of these would require a substantial time
commitment from the day faculty, which may prove to be a stumbling block to this process.

14. **What would you change to provide the most impact on assessment in your
department? Explain and be as specific as you can.**

Please see responses above.
B. Department MFT Results

The number of results for the Political Science MFT were extremely low and the report cannot be made public for confidentiality reasons.
C. Political Science MFT Analysis

1. Please provide us with a summary of your 2013/14 MFT data.

One student took the exam. [Individual student results redacted for confidentiality]

2. How does the 2013/14 MFT data compare to MFT data from previous years? Explain.

These scores are consistent with previous years. The institutional mean has been at or above the national average almost every year. Our students generally do well on the exam.

3. What does this MFT data tell you about student learning in your program? What can be done at the course level to improve student learning based on this data?

The results indicate that the student performed well in the major subcategories of the discipline. The N size is too small to draw any conclusions, and there is no information that would suggest specific improvements at the course level.

4. Did anything about the 2013/14 MFT results surprise you? If so, what was surprising about them? Please be as specific as possible.

5. What changes have you made in the past as a result of MFT data? Did these changes appear to have an effect on the 2013/14 MFT data?

Our MFT results are almost always very strong. We have not made changes as a result of the MFT.

6. What curricular or programmatic changes would you suggest exploring/making based on the 2013/14 MFT data? None