

## **HIST Annual Assessment Report, 2019-20**

In 2019-20, we assessed Learning Goal 3-D: “Create written arguments based upon the presentation of evidence and analysis.” In our newly revised SAP, we have laid out a plan to use both direct (capstone rubric, skills evaluations for HIST 300 and HIST 480) and indirect (senior survey) assessment to gauge History majors’ achievement of this goal.

As this is the first year implementing our capstone rubric and 300-480 skills evaluations, we did not have data from them to inform our conversation. Survey data from the last eight years suggests that almost all graduating history majors feel that their “experience in history courses contributed toward the development of the ability to create written arguments based upon the presentation of evidence and analysis” (see chart below).

We also noted, however, informal student feedback suggesting that all students should be required to take HIST 450 Advanced Research and Writing, which prompted a discussion about equal opportunity to develop research and writing skills through the completion of the major. In fact, this has been expressed in the comments section of our senior survey as well (see Survey Question #10 and student answers below). We noted that a majority of majors have taken HIST 450 the past few years (75% the last three years) and use the research paper developed there for the capstone course (where they revise and present it both in writing and oral presentation). We acknowledged that there has been a perception among students that those who take 450 have an advantage in 480, but noted that if there is one, it has not been measurable through our assessment methods, as students who use papers from other courses do not have demonstrably different grades or writing outcomes.

After some discussion, it was suggested that, rather than commenting on writing skills development, which we focus on in almost every course in the major, the feedback was really focused on the somewhat arbitrary minimum length suggestion for the paper students bring to HIST 480 to revise and present (12-15 pages). This is supported by senior survey comments over the past five years (see below). Students in 450 generally produce a 20-page paper and therefore, as students have commented, have more to work with than those who do not. But we also noted that some students who revise shorter papers end up with excellent papers and presentations. As our capstone is meant to polish not just students’ research and writing, but also oral presentation, discussion, and collaboration skills, we do not want the focus to be on the length of the paper, but on its organization, use of evidence, and style.

Thus, rather than making 450 a requirement, we decided to lower the suggested minimum length for 480 papers to ten pages and 450 papers to fifteen. In combination with active advising (we have made a point to remind majors in advising sessions of the need to have a paper for 480 over the past several years), we hope this will allow HIST 450 to more clearly focus on the research process for those who want it, and HIST 480 to emphasize revision, student collaboration, and presentation.

## Survey Data

Survey: My experience in history courses contributed toward the development of the ability to create written arguments based upon the presentation of evidence and analysis.

	SA	Agree	Neither	Disagree	SD	N/A
2012	6	4	0	0	0	0
2013	8	0	1	0	0	0
2014	7	3	0	0	0	0
2015	4	3	0	0	0	0
2016	6	2	0	0	0	0
2017	4	2	0	0	0	0
2018	5	0	1	0	0	0
2019	6	0	1	0	0	0
Total:	46	14	3	0	0	0

**Senior Survey Question #10 with relevant student responses:**

- “Are there any requirements that you would recommend the department add in order to strengthen the major?”
  - “I really think that Advanced Research & Writing should be a requirement of the history major. If I had not taken it, I have no idea what I would have done in Capstone because I don't think any of the shorter papers I wrote in other courses would have been suitable (either because of the starting length or just me not being passionate enough about it to want to continue working on it for an entire semester). I understand that the reasoning behind not requiring it is that not every student wants to write a thesis, but I personally think that writing a thesis should just be a part of being a history major. If HIST450 isn't going to be a required, then advisors need to make it very clear to their advisees that they have to have a paper in mind for 480. It seemed like some students who didn't take 450 weren't entirely aware of this and had to work much harder to make a previous paper work for the course” (2020).
  - “Maybe 450. It provides such a strong starting point for capstone and I feel like some students benefit from that. As it is the department doesn't have too many requirements compared to other majors and other social science departments require a two semester thesis experience.” (2019)
  - “I think everyone should have to take HIST450. I think The students who didn't take it struggled and had to work unnecessarily hard in 480. Also, I think writing such a substantial research paper is very beneficial toward growth as students” (2017).
  - “I think 450 (Adv Research and Writing) should be required. It creates a pretty significant difference in the length/amount of research/material to work with in 480. Students who didn't have 450 and used other papers had significantly less information to cut down for presentations, significantly less to edit and rewrite. Also, 450 was just a really beneficial course and extremely satisfying as a completion to my senior year. It made me really expand my researching abilities and time management skills. It also made the material fresh on my mind for 480, which I think was a huge help. If that requirement is difficult for students fall semester of senior year, maybe an option for spring of junior year might work” (2016).