This report presents the progress accomplished by the History department in the course of the 2004-2005 year.

The History Department Goals

I. Review of Program Goals from our program review proposal in 2004

A. History majors will « demonstrate a stronger competency in their theoretical understanding and practical application of historical methodology ».

B. In World History, students will « gain a general literacy in early modern and modern world history, an ability to locate themselves in time and place, an awareness of their own limited understanding of other cultures, a stronger set of analytical and critical skills in reading and writing, and a desire to grow further into a mature Christian ».

C. History majors should be able to articulate the relationship between their major and their vocation as well as with the « broader liberal arts mission of the college ».

Goals A and C were discipline specific while goal B was connected to the General Education program. Because the department has shifted focus from its original plan, we will examine the relationship of our current goals to the institutional standards in the following section.

II. Changes in direction

In March 2004, the Program Review Committee encouraged us to « focus on one or two of the goals that were specified in the plan rather than attempting to accomplish… all the goals that were laid out ». We decided to focus on goals A and C –although ongoing conversations will continue on the topic of World History.

The department devoted much time to discussing, clarifying and articulating the goals implicit under the broad topic of historical methodology. As a result, the department subdivided this goals into four different areas:
1. **Skills in Reading Primary Sources**
To read a primary source historically and critically, students must be able to:
- Contextualize the source
- Critically assess the source
- Demonstrate their ability to recognize the ways in which their own background impacts their interpretation

2. **Skills in Reading Secondary Sources**
To read a secondary source effectively, students must be able to:
- understand the main thesis or argument of a secondary source
- engage in informed criticism
- assess its truth value

3. **Skills in Writing**
To write a good history paper, students must be able to:
- Develop an argument.
- Make use of different forms of historical writing.
- Write in an appropriate manner.
- Provide the requisite scholarly apparatus.

4. **Skills in Historical Research**
To be effective historical researchers, students must be able to:
- Select an appropriate research topic
- Locate relevant primary and secondary sources
- Determine the character of the existing historiography on their topic

For each of the four stated goals, the department composed a detailed and developed list of expectations for its students —see attachment 1. This list allows us to connect our departmental goals to the College-wide goals and standards.

### III. College-wide Goals

While the goals stated are clearly discipline specific, they are connected to several institutional learning goals.

**Critical-Interdisciplinary Standard**: «general skills», «Complex problem solving», «Limits»)

**Diversity Standard**: «Self-reflection», «Discussion and Analysis of issues», «Formulation of knowledge»

**Written and Oral Communication Standard**: all apply to our goals.

**Research and Technology Standard**: «research and documentation»
Reading Primary Sources

Five different tools were used to assess students’ performance in this area. Three out of five tools have yielded results.

1. In the Spring of 2005:
   - **In History 1**: Each week, students were required to make written comments on a given primary document. I provided them with instruction on how to read primary documents in the second week of class. To see whether they had learnt how to read such documents competently, I made them respond to one particular document on two occasions: first, early in the semester before I had given them any suggestions on how to do this; and second, at the end of the semester after they had had both instruction and practice. Comparing the students’ two responses to the document allowed me to measure how their approach to primary source material had changed.
   I assessed the students’ responses on four criteria:
   1. Does it contain the details of who is writing this document and when?
   2. Does it raise the possibility of bias either in the source or in the reader?
   3. Does it contain evidence that the document raised questions for the student?
   4. Does it provide some depth or breadth of analysis, or is it merely superficial?

Numbers of responses
There were 26 students in the class. I collected 14 initial responses (many had mislaid them by the time I collected them at the end of the semester) and 22 second responses.

Results by category: raw numbers

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response 1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
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<td>Response 2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
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Results by category: as a percentage of the number of responses

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<td>Response 1</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>35.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Response 2</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>95.5</td>
<td>81.8</td>
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</table>
In History 121: Students were asked to analyze a selection of “Miracles of Saint Foy” (in Patrick Geary, Readings in Medieval History, (Sydney: Broadview, 2003) 1-8). Geary provided a short biographical sketch for the author. I gave students a study guide organized according to three broad categories:

- The text’s argument
- The historical conclusions
- The text’s reliability

11 students turned in the analysis. One student turned it in after class, and the information listed was most likely a set of class notes, rather than an independent reading of the text.

**Text’s argument:**
- One student did not understand the text
- Four students summarized the text—mentioned main topics such as miracles and pilgrimages.
- Four students identified clearly the aims of the text—to provide support for Ste Foy’s cult.
- One student exceeded expectations by arguing that the text presented the concept of witness as validation.

**Historical Findings:**
- One student was unable to establish a connection between the text and the history studied in class
- Four students found it difficult to move beyond very broad categories of analysis (such as “this tells us about religious history”) or lacked proper vocabulary to draw conclusions effectively (for instance talk about “mysticism”).
- Three students identified more than one area of history for which this text was relevant (such as religious and cultural or social history) yet their analysis lacked significant detail.
- Two students provided a wide range of conclusions (on social, gender, literary, artistic history) and illustrated their points with specific examples.

**Reliability:**
In this area, there was a wider gap between students.
- Five students were unable to link the author’s background to the text—either because they did not read or understand the introduction provided by the editor (“I don’t know anything about the author”, or because they did not understand the question “if it is in our reader, it must be reliable”).
Three students performed adequately on this task (they identified the author as an educated clergyman), but found it difficult to say why it was relevant for the interpretation of the text.

Two students identified key elements of the author’s background (a man, a member of the elite) and of the audience (the clergy, the educated) and explained why this was of significance.

Summary of the Findings

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>(A)</th>
<th>(B)</th>
<th>(C)</th>
<th>(D)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argument</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two sets of data from History 121 remain to be analyzed

2. In the Fall of 2005:

In History 185, students were given a choice of writing three short essays, 1000 words each, or one longer essay, 3000 words. The essays were to analyze primary sources contained in the Course Reader. Each cluster of readings addressed a key debate within modern Indian history: the educational controversy, the problem of untouchability, and the Partition of India. Students were to 1) identify the main arguments of each side and 2) ‘take a side’ and argue for its merits. A portion of a class session was devoted to identifying the key elements of a successful essay. These included:

- A clear thesis in the introduction and develops that thesis throughout the essay. In this particular assignment, the thesis was to explain which thinker presented the strongest arguments and why.
- A keen grasp of the arguments of each side of a debate.
- The essay concluded by describing the larger significance of the debate for Indian history.

13 student submitted their essays on time. One submitted late for extreme circumstances, the other out of negligence. Two of them opted for the long essay, the rest for the three short ones.

A. Statement of argument:

- Only 3 out of fifteen students developed a reasonably clear thesis in their paper (s).
- Of the 3 that presented a thesis, only one of them presented it in a way that reflected their own insights, as opposed to simply restating the views of their preferred author.
• 8 students did little more than identify the passages they intended to analyze.
• 3 students did not bother to state or develop a thesis in their papers.

B. Grasp of arguments of each side:
• Three students misunderstood or misrepresented the viewpoints of authors in their essays.
• Five students represented views accurately, but not thoroughly. They picked and chose which points would be their focus, but neglected other important points in the process.
• One student who wrote a long essay clearly did not grasp the main ideas contained in the readings.

C. Significance
* Only three students concluded their essays by stating the wider significance of the debate for Indian history.
* The remainder of the students simply stated who they thought “won” the debate and why.

Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thesis</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grasp</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Writing a History Paper

In the Fall of 2005, in the HIS140 course, Alister Chapman decided to assess the students’ ability to write good history papers. The semester was divided into three sections, with four topics in each. For each topic there was an essay question and a selection of between four and ten articles and books on reserve in the library. Students were asked to read several of these resources, synthesize the material, and then in eight to ten pages provide a careful, reasoned response to the question set. Each student had to write three papers, one from each section. This assessment exercise, therefore, was intended to measure our students’ abilities in two areas that we have identified as fundamental for our majors: reading secondary literature and writing coherent papers.

Alister decided on six criteria which would measure students’ abilities in these areas, and then graded each paper on these criteria. The six criteria were:

- Writing a clear Introduction, complete with a statement of the paper’s argument
Carrying a clear *Argument* throughout the paper
- Demonstrating a solid *Grasp* of the secondary sources on the subject (the articles and books on reserve at the library)
- Using these *Sources* carefully, judiciously, and creatively in the paper
- Writing a strong and thoughtful *Conclusion*
- Clear and accurate *Composition*

Breaking the course into three sections then allowed him to see whether the students’ performance improved over the course of the semester. Alister also made clear to the students how they had done on each of these criteria in each paper, so that they could see the areas they needed to work on.

Most students in the class had taken the HIS1 Introduction to History course, in which our department focuses on the acquisition of the skills which we see as fundamental for our majors and minors, and one was therefore able to assume some level of prior training in the areas of reading and writing as history students. Alister did, however, provide instruction throughout the semester on how to approach the task of writing.

The tables below show how the students did in each of the six areas being assessed and how their performance changed over the course of the semester.

The numerical scale used for the purposes of these calculations is as follows:

- A+ = 10
- A = 9
- A- = 8
- B+/B = 7
- B- = 6
- C+/C = 5
- C- = 4
- D = 2

The data below is based on all fourteen students in the class, except Section C for which I only had data for thirteen of the students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>INTRO</th>
<th>ARGU</th>
<th>GRASP</th>
<th>SOURCES</th>
<th>CONC</th>
<th>COMPO</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Averages for Section A</td>
<td>6.43</td>
<td>6.21</td>
<td>5.79</td>
<td>5.86</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>6.06</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Averages for Section C</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>7.31</td>
<td>7.08</td>
<td>7.46</td>
<td>6.85</td>
<td>7.08</td>
<td>7.24</td>
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<td>4. Change from A to B</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Change from B to C</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Change from A to C</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>1.18</td>
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</table>

Line 6 provides a sense of how the students’ performance changed over the whole semester, and the results are broadly positive. The average score increased by an average of 1.18 points on the above scale between sections A and sections C, or approximately one third to one half of a letter grade. More illuminating is the data on how they did in particular areas, in terms of both which areas they did best/worst in and which areas saw the greatest/least improvement over the course of the semester.
1. The two areas in which the students did consistently well were writing a strong introduction and sustaining a clear historical argument.
2. The one area in which students consistently underperformed was the quality of their composition.
3. The quality of conclusions was noticeably weak in sections B and C.
4. By the end of the semester, the students’ work was strongest in their introductions, their arguments, and their use of sources.

Using lines 4, 5 and 6 to gauge improvement, the following conclusions emerge:

1. There are no clear patterns of consistently strong or lackluster improvement in any one area. For example, improvement in composition was marked between sections B and C, but non-existent between sections A and B, while improvement in the ability to handle sources well showed the greatest improvement between sections A and B and yet by this measure ranked only fourth out of the six between sections B and C.
2. For the semester as a whole, the greatest improvements were in the students’ ability to deal competently with their sources and in their composition.
3. By far and away the least amount of improvement was seen in the conclusions to the students’ papers.

All Skills

In the Fall 2005, the department administered a student survey to students in HIS 198 at the completion of the course. On the survey, students were asked to self-assess their skill level when they began the course and when they finished the course in five areas – bibliographical research, analyzing primary sources, critically reading secondary sources, formulating historical arguments, and writing history effectively. They rated themselves on a 5 point scale (1 being the lowest, 5 being the highest). The survey also included open-ended questions for each of the five skill areas, giving students opportunities to identify aspects of the course that either enhanced or failed to enhance their skill development.

Statistical Findings

All nine students in the course participated in the survey. The following data indicates the average score that students gave themselves in each of the five skills areas, as well as the raw number of students who reported improvement in that skill area. No student reported a decline in his/her skill level for any of the areas.

A. Research
   Before course = 2.61
   After course = 3.44
   7 of 9 students reported improvement in this area.
B. Primary Sources
   Before course = 2.56
   After course  = 3.22
   7 of 9 students reported improvement in this area.

C. Secondary Sources
   Before course = 2.83
   After course  = 3.67
   8 of 9 students reported improvement in this area.

D. Historical Argumentation
   Before course = 2.56
   After course  = 3.72
   9 of 9 students reported improvement in this area.

E. Historical Writing
   Before course = 2.44
   After course  = 3.17
   7 of 9 students reported improvement in this area.

Open-ended Questions Findings
Most students included brief comments for most of the open-ended questions. What follows is a summation of the most prevalent comments regarding each of the five skill areas.

Research – Assignment-wise, students found the annotated bibliography the most helpful task in enhancing their bibliographic research skills. They identified the resources at UCSB library as ones they wish they had been familiar with prior to entering the class.

Primary Sources – Students who utilized a large quantity of primary sources in their research projects reported more substantial improvement in their skill development here.

Secondary Sources – Students reported that the course texts (collections of historical essays on methodological and philosophical issues), the reading questions they had to write in response to text readings, and working with large quantities of secondary sources for their research projects all enhanced their ability to read secondary sources efficiently for key arguments and relevance.

Historical argumentation – Students noted three means through which they experienced improvement in this area: the sheer scope of their research project forced a constant refinement of their arguments through many revisions of their outlines; the examples of historical arguments in the course texts provided models of historical argumentation; mentoring meetings with individual faculty provided opportunities to talk through the argument of their papers.
Historical writing – Students note improvement in this area coming as a result of the quantity of writing required in the course and the mentoring meetings with individual faculty who provided feedback on their drafts.

### Interpretation of Results

**Reading Primary Sources**

**Contextualizing the source**: The data collected over the course of a year (Spring and Fall 05) suggests that, with proper guidance and repetition, students do improve in their skills. In History 1, student responses showed improvement in all four categories. Most recognized the importance of noting down details such as date and author, though 7/22 still did not. The great majority were able to provide some good analysis of the source and specify questions which it raised for them. Yet, it is also noteworthy that over 30% of students still did not write down the basic details of the source. This lack of « historical reflexes » seems to be confirmed by the other tools the department used.

**Critical Analysis**: In History 1, most striking was the fact that most students did not raise the question of possible bias either in the sources or in themselves as readers. In the History 121 assessment, about half of the students found it difficult to move beyond a literal reading of the text, and to identify the goals and functions of the source. Students also found it difficult to move beyond one area of history, and to consider a source as valid for a multiplicity of investigations and interpretations. In some cases, they lacked the specific vocabulary that would help them analyze the text. Overall, they seem to pay little attention to detail. In History 185, students were able to identify the main arguments of the sources, but they often were unable to go beyond a mere statement of the views of an author (using quotes or a citation) and provide their own, original insights about those views using their own words. They also found it difficult to draw comparisons between the authors.

**Writing a History Paper**

The data collected in History 140 suggests that student’s performance does improve in the course of the semester. Indeed, there was only one area where the overall improvement was less than 1.00, namely the conclusions to their papers. The reason for this may lie simply in feelings of relief sweeping over students slightly too soon as they realize that they have only one more paragraph to write. Aside from the conclusions, there was one other area where the students’ performance was particularly disappointing, namely their grasp – their ability to take in and synthesize the historical arguments in the sources they read. The papers did show significant improvement in this regard over the semester, but the average score for this criteria in section C was significantly lower than those for introduction, argument, and use of the sources.
The data collected in History 185 seems to confirm this tendency. Students generally have a difficult time formulating a thesis, especially when it requires that they distinguish their own authorial voice from the viewpoints they are trying to represent. A common tendency was to summarize each side of the debate and conclude simply by stating “I believe x had the stronger arguments.” However, there was very little explanation or analysis that explains the merits of x’s arguments. Had I foreseen this challenge of theirs, I would have taken more time to find their own voice and explain what this entails. These results suggest that the students generally did a better job representing the views of others than developing their own thinking and assessment of those views.

Identifying the significance of the debate was perhaps the most disappointing result of the assignment. It reflects the difficulty students experience in drawing connections between concrete data, debates, and ideas and wider concerns relating to questions of justice, cultural pluralism or national unity (reflected in the course). The struggles they faced on this point resemble the problems encountered in developing and defending a thesis. Are they able to go beyond a mere restatement of someone else’s viewpoint and explain why that viewpoint carries merit in that particular context?

In History 198, students considered themselves weakest in historical writing at both the beginning and end of the course. Conversely, students enter the course most confident about their ability to read secondary sources and leave the course with relatively high self-assessment scores in this area. Less clear are the reasons for student improvement, though their responses to the open-ended questions give some hints. Key factors here seem to include the sheer scope and demands of the research project which forces them to practice each of these skills at a level and to a degree unprecedented for all of them, and the individual mentoring provided by faculty members in the course of doing their projects.

### Using the Results

This past year assessment provided the department with some anticipated conclusions (practicing historical skills helps in improving historical skills) and some specific directions to follow, in curricular and course-specific terms:

**History 1**
1. On the positive side, the evidence suggests that the course allowed many students to develop in one of the core skills which the department has identified as a priority for this course.
2. More discussion on the need for investigating bias in sources is clearly needed.
3. The professor also need to stress the importance of noting down source details.
History 198

1. Since students who utilized a large quantity of primary sources in their research projects reported more substantial improvement in their skill development here, the department needs to think about its exact expectations in this area.
2. The benefits of the course, as it has been revised, are at least two fold for the students:
   - Benefits of a semester-long project
   - Benefits of faculty mentoring system

The data provided us with a sense of which areas the students struggled with most, and which areas may therefore require greater attention from us in future semesters:
   - We need to spend more time with the students on how to read secondary sources and synthesize arguments from different historians.
   - We need to model how to read primary and secondary sources. This can be done in the course of a lecture, by putting up a short text and using the very same questions they will have to respond to. Repeating this demonstration several times might also help.

For a list of the data available and its location, see attachment 2.

Next Steps

Departmental Discussions

1. We can probably come up with more creative ideas to better train our students in a critical reading of primary and secondary sources. It seems that we have not drawn full conclusions from our data.
2. The department needs to bring the different guidelines on historical skills into a single document that can be distributed to students in all classes.
3. The department needs to further articulate its standards for oral presentations.
4. We need to discuss further the exact content of the portfolio, and the ways in which it will be assessed and used in History 198. We need to figure out what means might be necessary to guide and encourage students in starting, maintaining, and updating their portfolios throughout their careers, so they have a meaningful body of work on which to reflect in HIS 198
5. We need to think about possible benchmarks.
6. We need to consider what possible external voices could be involved in our review process.
7. The department is working on providing transportation to UCSB for its students

Future Assessment

1. Assessment in History 1 will continue this Spring semester.
2. We need to consider analyzing data collectively: the department has talked about using the Fall semester seminar paper as a way to assess our students’ performance in writing History papers.

3. We need to find ways to assess the way in which students articulate the relationship between their major and their vocation as well as with the «broader liberal arts mission of the college. So far, the assessment in HIS 198 has not generated the data we would need to speak to that issue. Our senior seminar, History 198 is now a combination between an integrative and a research course.
   - Students will better understand the place of history within a larger Liberal Arts education
   - Final projects format will vary according to the student’s sense of their vocation and questions about the integration of history into their lives/
   - Substantial changes have been made to the course to allow for questions of integration to be explored more fully. In particular, two discussion sessions (the equivalent of two weeks of classes) have been included in the schedule. The survey also includes a question on this topic.

How do we make sure that History 198 does actually fulfill the goals it claims to fulfill?

4. The department chair will be working on a senior survey.
Attachment 1

What We Want for Our Graduates- Westmont History Department

In the course of their studies as History majors, students should develop skills in reading, research and writing that are specific to their field.

Skills in Reading Primary Sources

Students should know how to read a primary source historically and critically. They should be able to:

1. Contextualize the source
2. Critically assess the source
3. Demonstrate their ability to assess how their own background impacts their interpretation

1. Students should know what to ask from a primary documents

They should know to ask about:

- the genre of the source
- the author
- the date and circumstances of composition
- the audience

- Genre

Graduates should develop a precise vocabulary that allows them to identify the nature of the source. They should distinguish between written sources and other types of sources (visual, oral, material culture), and within written sources, they should draw distinctions between oral traditions, printed documents and manuscripts. They should also be able to differentiate between prescriptive and descriptive literature. They should pay close attention to the ways in which conventions affect the content and usefulness of the source (for instance, literary, epistolary or photographic conventions). For example, they should be familiar with the following terms:

Visual Sources: media (photography, sculpture, painting…), maps
Material culture: clothing, relics, furniture, tools…
Written Sources: government documents, newspapers, political treatises, statistical tables, letters (official versus private correspondence), memoirs, literary sources (novels, poems, epics, myths, romances…), sermons…

- Authorship
Graduates should know that they need to consider:

- the author’s lifetime (did the author live at the time of the events? what he/she a witness to the events?)
- the author’s class or social function
- the author’s sex
- the author’s ethnicity
- the author’s religious background
- the author’s national identity
- the author’s political affiliation

Wherever it is relevant, graduates should consider the effect this information has on the interpretation of the text. When a source is anonymous, they should consider carefully the ways in which the text might give some clues as to the background of its author.

- **Date, circumstances and context of composition**

  Graduates should be able to discuss the relevance of the date of composition for the interpretation of the text. They should pay close attention to the time-span elapsed between the events or movements considered by the primary source and the date of composition. What happened between the events and the date of composition? How does it affect the reading of the text? For instance, Luther’s writings before the Peasants’ war tended to use martial imagery, and argue for free access and interpretation of Scriptures. After the Peasants’ War, Luther is far more careful in this.

  Students should consider carefully the broad context in which the text is written. Contextualization implies that students can connect the text to other relevant information they have acquired about the time-period (in their textbooks, in lectures or class-discussions). This includes familiarity with the language used at the time (or simply the recognition that the language used by the author is different from our own), and with the relevant aspect of the cultural setting.

- **Audience**

  Graduates should pay close attention to the ways in which the **intended audience** for the source affected what is said, what is not said and how is said. This should impact their interpretation of the source. For instance, Luther’s sermons in the vernacular were directed at a larger and more popular audience than his theological treatises. This affects the style as well as the content of the source.

  When it is relevant, students should draw distinctions between the intended audience and effective audience of the source. For instance, the *Imitation of Christ* is not initially intended for a lay audience, yet as it is translated into
vernacular languages, it becomes a standard text for lay devotion. Students are encouraged to ask questions about the reception of the source and the history of this reception.

2. Students should be able to draw conclusions about the reliability and usefulness of the source

They should identify the main points of the source, its content (in terms of descriptive information or prescriptive information) and its meaning. Considering all the information gathered about the author, the circumstances of composition and the audience, what questions does the source allow you to answer? What questions can’t it answer? How do you assess its claims?

Graduates should be able to draw conclusions about the areas of history the source speaks to (social, political, economic...). How does the source contribute to your understanding of the broad topic? Students are expected to grow in their level of specificity in the course of their major.

3. Students should exercise critical judgement in their analysis

Students should be aware of the assumptions they bring in their analysis of the source. By their senior year, they should be capable of a high degree of comprehension and empathy when confronted to cultures that are unfamiliar or behavior that they disprove of.

Skills in Reading Secondary Sources

Students should be able to understand the main thesis or argument of a secondary source, engage in informed criticism, and assess its truth value. These skills are important not only for written assignments, but also for class discussions.¹

1. Contextualizing a Source

This requires an inspectional reading to discover the nature and purpose of the book or article in question.

- Inspectional reading

¹ The structure and some of the content of this guide have been drawn and adapted from Mortimer Adler, How to Read a Book (Simon and Schuster, 1940).
Conduct a first reading of an assigned article(s) or chapter(s) quickly, without taking long breaks. Try to identify the book/article’s genre and principle topics, divisions, themes, etc. If reading for a research paper, read relevant sections of books and articles in the same manner. When skimming and pre-reading, pay special attention to the title, the back cover blurbs, the publisher (University Press? A more laypersons’ press? i.e., who is the audience?), the table of contents, the index.

- **Classify or categorize the history book or article**

Ask two questions:

**Question #1:** What kind of a book/article is it?
- Historical monograph: If so, what is its focus? A region (with dates), a people, a biography, an event, series of events, or process (examples= American Civil War, French Revolution, urbanization in early America, the Second Great Awakening)
- Other types of historical writing: Memoirs, dairies, travel journals, government studies or documentation.

**Question #2:** How does your answer to the first question influence what to look for in the Book/article and how to read it? What kinds of information do you expect to obtain from this kind of source?

2. Determining an Author’s Thesis or Argument

- **Identifying key terms, concepts, or themes**

Discover the most important terms and ideas by observing repetition (Is the word or phrase frequently repeated?), italicized terms, how the author disputes how other authors use the same terms (e.g., “colonialism,” “peasant uprisings,” “secularization,” etc.), terms or concepts that others (book reviewers, other authors, or your professors) have noted when referring to the book, other types of emphasis: boldface, title words, words/concepts appearing in introductory paragraphs or topics sentences, etc.

Note how is the author defining or using those words/concepts:
- Look for explicit definitions or descriptions after their first usage
- How might the author’s use of those terms differ from their usage elsewhere?

Identify important propositions, thesis statements, or summary sections of the book or article. Pay special attention to the introductions of the book/article or sections, the conclusions, how others have summarized the book or article in reviews, and the historiography.
How does an author use his/her key terms to make an historical claim or thesis?

Identify what s/he is arguing against as a signal of what s/he is arguing for.

Take the whole article or book into consideration before making a final determination of what its thesis is:
- discern the flow of thought through the course of many chapters or sections.
- Is the thesis reflected in the structure of the book/article as a whole? (If not, it probably is not a coherently crafted book/article).

Be able to state the thesis of the book/article in your own words, while remaining true to the meaning of the author.
If the author could hear your summary of the book, would s/he approve of how you’ve represented it?
- Admit your own prejudices openly. How might they be affecting your grasp or ‘pre-judgment’ of the thesis? Are you creating a straw man, or have you grasp the author on his/her own terms?
- Be honest about what you do and do not understand in a secondary source. In some instances, a source may present material that goes beyond what you can be expected to know. In such instances, try to identify what you would need to know in order to proceed to make a judgment about the source.

3. Criticizing a Book/Article.

“Thou shall not take cheap shots” (Nick Woltersdorff). Criticism is a positive, negative, or neutral evaluation of the book’s thesis and the evidence used to support it. Note: Criticism is not necessarily negative, but it is necessarily informed. You must understand something to criticize it.

How well does the author support his/her thesis?

Identify types of evidence: Were primary sources used? Were the sources relevant to the claims being made? Were the sources credible? Were they well documented? If you wanted to find the sources, has the author given you the requisite information to do so?

Does the evidence support the thesis? Are the author’s conclusions the only ones that could be drawn from the evidence? If not, what other kinds of conclusions could be drawn? Has the author addressed alternative readings of the evidence? Has the author addressed counter arguments? If the argument fails, why does it fail? Identify the ‘weak link’. Identify unspoken assumptions on which the author relies for his/her thesis. Are these assumptions to be accepted as true? If
not, is the argument defeated? Is the author well-informed, misinformed, uninformed, illogical, or incomplete?

- What is your final assessment of the article/book’s truth value and significance? Do you agree or disagree with what you’ve read? What is at stake in the argument being presented? What wider concerns, extending beyond the topic at hand, does the work address? Would our grasp of the event, person or process be significantly altered if the book were not written?

Skills in Research

Research is at the heart of the historian’s task. Therefore, our graduates should be able to carry on historical research well, having developed a range of skills and aptitudes foundational for independent historical inquiry.

To be effective historical researchers, students must be able to:

1. Select an appropriate research topic
2. Locate relevant primary and secondary sources
3. Determine the character of the existing historiography on their topic

1. Graduates should know how to identify and define an appropriate topic for historical research

A critical starting point for any research project is the identification of a research topic that is researchable and worth researching.

- Students should be able to ascertain the qualities of a good research topic. They may do so through asking questions such as: Is the topic interesting to me? Is it plausible to research? Does the topic suit my intellectual ability? Is the subject doable in the prescribed paper length? Are there adequate and appropriate sources available to me on this subject? Does this topic matter or why is it significant?
- Students should be able to formulate a good, central research question with corresponding sub-questions to guide their research. Research questions should be clear, open-ended, of appropriate scope, answerable, and of appropriate complexity. An example of a good central research question might be “For what reasons and to what extent did Germany’s use of unrestricted submarine warfare contribute to America’s decision to enter World War One?” Sub-questions might include: What were the reasons for Germany’s submarine policy? What did the Germans anticipate the American response to be? How committed was the Wilson administration and the American public to maintaining our policy of neutrality? What political, economic, military, and moral considerations shaped American reactions to submarine warfare? Etc.
2. **Graduates should know how to locate pertinent primary and secondary sources for their research topics**

Identifying and locating useful historical evidence (primary and secondary sources) is essential to the completion of sound historical research.

- Students should be able to navigate effectively within the library collections of Westmont and a university research library (e.g. UCSB). This essentially means knowing how to access all the resources that these libraries have available to students of history, particularly through effective use of online catalogs.
- Students should be able to locate and use printed and online reference works including dictionaries, encyclopedias, and bibliographies.
- Students should be able to locate and use printed and online databases/search engines, especially those geared towards historical research such as *World Cat*, *Historical Abstracts*, and *America: History and Life*.
- Students should be able to use interlibrary loan efficiently and effectively.
- Students should be able to differentiate between primary and secondary sources as they relate to their topics.
- Students should be able to differentiate between scholarly and popular sources on their topics.
- Students should be able to evaluated the reliability of Internet sources.

3. **Graduates should know how to ascertain the character of the existing historiography on their research topics**

Historical research typically builds upon the work of past scholars. As students engage in their research, they enter into ongoing conversations.

- Students should be able to map and categorize the interpretations past historians have offered on subjects related to their research. This will require effective reading of secondary sources (see Reading Secondary Sources in History).
- Students should be able to determine neglected or understudied aspects of their research topics based on their familiarity with the existing historiography.
- Students should be able to recognize representations of major schools of interpretation (e.g. Marxist, Feminist, Subaltern) as they may appear within the scholarship on their subject.
- Students should be able to locate and make effective use of book reviews of relevant works on their topics.
Every academic discipline has its own particular conventions when it comes to writing. History graduates should therefore be able to write well as historians. Such writing may take a variety of different forms, including book reports, annotated bibliographies, and in-class essays, but the principal form of writing in the discipline is papers which develop a historical argument. This document will therefore focus on the sort of papers which our graduates should be able to write.

To write a good history paper, students must be able to:

1. Develop an argument.
2. Make use of different forms of historical writing.
3. Write in an appropriate manner.
4. Provide the requisite scholarly apparatus.

1. **Students should be able to develop an argument**

A good argument is the key to a good history paper. Students should therefore know how to put a good historical argument together.

To that end, students must learn how to:

- Write strong introductions to their papers with a *clear thesis statement*. A thesis statement is typically a single statement which lays out the central contentions of the paper. A good introduction is one that states what the paper is about, what it will argue for, and (usually) how the student will develop that argument in the various sections of the paper.
- *Structure* their papers. Papers should be broken up into clear sections, ideally adumbrated in the introduction and marked clearly with headings in the text. Each section of the paper should make a clear contribution to the argument being mounted, and be explicitly tied to that argument.
- Write appropriate *transitions*. The beginning and end of each section of the paper are particularly important. Students should be able to craft these in such a way that the reader is reminded of the paper’s argument, how it is being developed, and how the constituent parts of the paper fit together.
- Compose coherent *paragraphs*. Every paragraph should contribute to the overall argument of the paper. Opening topic sentences are one way of ensuring this, but however it is done, students should make clear how each paragraph relates to their argument.
- Write an effective *conclusion*. Students should be able to write conclusions which form a fitting climax to their papers, as opposed to allowing them to peter out. An effective conclusion is one which reminds the reader of the paper’s key arguments, as well as possibly raising further questions raised by the student’s research.
2. **Students should be able to make use of different forms of historical writing**

A good history paper will use a variety of modes of writing. Students must master these in order to present their argument effectively.

In particular, students must learn how to use the following forms of historical writing:

- **Narrative.** Every history paper will include some account of what happened in the past. Students should be able to describe the events, people, and places that they study clearly and concisely, providing sufficient detail for the general reader but not a surfeit. Ideally, students should be able to recount events in ways which are sympathetic and absorbing.

- **Exposition.** This form of historical writing has two dimensions.
  - Firstly, students need to be able to put forward explanations of why things happened or why particular events were significant. Telling the reader what happened is not enough.
  - Secondly, students need to be able to incorporate the findings of their research on primary and secondary sources into their papers. This requires the ability to summarize these sources, and explain their significance. A key part of this is the ability to relate primary sources to historiographical debates and place secondary sources in these debates.

- **Argument.** Students should be able to argue historically in ways that are careful, fair, and compelling. Such arguments may relate to primary sources (why is a particular document important?), or to the historiography (why does the student find one historian more persuasive than another?), or to broader questions of significance or causation. These arguments may either be integral parts of the argument which is the whole paper or the whole itself.
  - In order to mount good arguments, students must be:
    - Careful – so as to understand others before agreeing or disagreeing.
    - Fair – so as not to misrepresent others.
    - Alert to how evidence is used – so as to gauge how much credence to give to a particular source.
    - Conscious of the strengths of different points of view – so as to avoid simplistic arguments.
    - Charitable – so as not to sound arrogant.
    - Able to marshal evidence for their case.
    - Willing to admit the weaknesses in their argument.

3. **Students should be able to write in an appropriate manner**

There are ways of writing that are inappropriate for history papers. Students should learn how to write in ways which are suitable for their task.

In particular, a good history paper will:

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2 This section makes use of Richard Marius and Melvin E. Page, *A Short Guide to Writing About History*, 5th edn. (New York: Pearson Education, 2005), 52-74, but modifies some of their categories.
• Be written in simple, clear, direct prose. Avoid ornamentation: there is no need for airs and graces.
• Use the active rather than the passive voice whenever possible.
• Use the past tense when referring to past events.
• Adopt a tone appropriate for an academic tone. Students do not need to affect pretentious prose, but they should be aware that papers are not the place for laid-back breeziness.
• Put the writer in the background. A good paper will be creative and reflect the student’s own personality, but ultimately it is about others and not a vehicle for self-promotion. The personal pronouns “I, me, my” should therefore usually be used rarely in a good history paper, and mainly in the introduction and conclusion.
• Use quotations appropriately. Quotations from primary sources should be used to illustrate your points and illuminate your people and periods. Quotations from secondary sources should be used sparingly, usually only when an author has said something so wonderfully that putting it into your own words would be a great shame; using your own words should be the default. Quotations should normally be less than three lines in length.

In addition, our graduates should be able to write English well, using correct grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation. Recommended style guides include:


4. **Students should be able to provide the requisite scholarly apparatus**

Students should be able to use the notation and bibliographic conventions laid out in the *Chicago Manual of Style*. They should know when to cite their sources, how to cite them correctly, and what should go into their bibliography.

A major reason for this is in order to avoid plagiarism. Students should consult the college’s “Plagiarism Policy” in order to understand what plagiarism is. Students should be particularly careful to provide a footnote whenever they are making use of material from their sources, even if they are not directly quoting them.
Attachment 2: Assessment Data

1. HIS 198 Student Self-assessment survey, Fall 2005
   - Raw data in Rick Pointer’s office
   - Data summary and analysis in department chair’s assessment computer file

2. HIS 185 Assessment of papers analyzing primary sources, Fall 2005
   - Raw data in Chandra Mallampalli’s office
   - Data summary and sample papers in department chair’s assessment computer file

3. HIS 140 Assessment of Students’ Writing, Fall 2005
   - Raw data in Alister Chapman’s office
   - Data summary and analysis in department chair’s assessment computer file

4. HIS 121 Assessment of Primary source responses, Spring 2005
   - Raw data in Marianne Robins’ office
   - Data summary in department chair’s assessment computer file

5. HIS 1 Assessment of Primary Documents’ responses, Spring 05
   - Raw data in Alister Chapman’s office
   - Data summary in department chair’s assessment computer file

6. HIS 121 Assessment of the use of primary sources in a paper (Ghosts in Islam)
   - Raw data in Marianne Robins’ office

7. HIS 121 Assessment of primary source analysis in an exam (feudalism)
   - Raw data in Marianne Robins’ office
Department Meetings

Feb. 6
Feb. 24
March 6
March 20
April 10
April 24

Departmental Discussions

8. We can probably come up with more creative ideas to better train our students in a critical reading of primary and secondary sources. It seems that we have not drawn full conclusions from our data.
9. The department needs to bring the different guidelines on historical skills into a single document that can be distributed to students in all classes.
10. The department needs to further articulate its standards for oral presentations.
11. We need to discuss further the exact content of the portfolio, and the ways in which it will be assessed and used in History 198. We need to figure out what means might be necessary to guide and encourage students in starting, maintaining, and updating their portfolios throughout their careers, so they have a meaningful body of work on which to reflect in HIS 198
12. We need to think about possible benchmarks.
13. We need to consider what possible external voices could be involved in our review process.
14. The department is working on providing transportation to UCSB for its students

Future Assessment

5. Assessment in History 1 will continue this Spring semester.
6. We need to consider analyzing data collectively: the department has talked about using the Fall semester seminar paper as a way to assess our students’ performance in writing History papers.
7. We need to find ways to assess the way in which students articulate the relationship between their major and their vocation as well as with the broader liberal arts mission of the college. So far, the assessment in HIS 198 has not generated the data we would need to speak to that issue. Our senior seminar, History 198 is now a combination between an integrative and a research course.
   - Students will better understand the place of history within a larger Liberal Arts education
   - Final projects format will vary according to the student’s sense of their vocation and questions about the integration of history into their lives/
   - Substantial changes have been made to the course to allow for questions of integration to be explored more fully. In particular, two discussion sessions (the equivalent of two weeks of classes) have been included in the schedule. The survey also includes a question on this topic.

How do we make sure that History 198 does actually fulfill the goals it claims to fulfill?
8. The department chair will be working on a senior survey.