The history department has identified two principal goals to concentrate upon for the current review cycle. They are:

1) We want our majors to demonstrate a stronger competency in their theoretical understanding and practical application of historical methodology.

2) We want our General Education students in world history to 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.

The first goal grows out of two departmental considerations -- first, a departmental sense (arrived at through informal and formal departmental conversations) that recent majors, individually and collectively, have demonstrated an inconsistent grasp of historical method, and second, our need to revise our senior level methods course to make it meet the expectations of an "integrating the major discipline" course within the new general education program. We attribute the student weakness in historical method to two factors relating to the department's two courses in historical method: first, for the past five years or so, HIS 198 Historical Method, Bibliography, and Research was not required of all majors, as it had been in the past; second, insufficient coordination or sequencing has occurred between our introductory methods class, HIS 1 Introduction to History, and HIS 198. As of 2003-2004, HIS 198 is once again required of all history majors. We wish for that course to be an effective "integrating the major discipline" class for our majors, a substantial part of which will mean seeing students develop stronger competency in historical methods at the senior level. We anticipate that by the fall of 2005 and even more so, by the fall of 2006, this course will have substantially greater enrollment. As a department, we wish to take the next couple of years to revise and refine the content of this course, alongside a similar revision and refinement of HIS 1. Re-defining what each of these courses should include and how they can better supplement each other is our main task. Amid this revision process, we also hope to identify how and when we can use these courses to provide our majors with clearer and more substantial vocational guidance.

Assessment of student progress toward the goal of greater competency in historical methodology is facilitated by the fact that the teaching of these courses is rotated and shared throughout the department. In the case of HIS 198, all members of the department attend the weekly seminar meetings, with one faculty person receiving teaching credit for it as part of his/her load. In the case of HIS 1, the goal of the department is to rotate who teaches that course from year to year, although recent practice has often seen the same person teach it for two to three years in a row due to scheduling constraints. By virtue of these shared responsibilities, department members are in a good position to evaluate student competencies as evidenced in their oral and written work. Particularly through HIS 198, all department members are able to witness student abilities to lead discussion, read secondary source articles critically, explain their research process, and present their research findings. In addition, we all read the final drafts of their research projects (the
main student work of the course). Beginning this semester, we plan to devote at least one departmental meeting per semester to discussion of student performance in these courses, focusing both on comparisons of the present year’s crop of students with prior years, and on each individual student’s level of growth. Beginning in the fall of 2004, we will have HIS 198 students complete a written survey at the end of the course consisting of three to four open-ended questions having to do with their own assessment of their understanding and practice of sound historical methods as a result of taking HIS 1 and HIS 198, as well as other courses in the major. This data will give us a better sense of student perceptions of their own abilities and the effectiveness of our two methods courses. In HIS 198 we will also be assessing how well our students are integrating their history major with the broader liberal arts mission of the college. To that end, we anticipate asking students to keep a portfolio or scrapbook of assignments, activities, events, etc. throughout their time as a history major that illustrate points of connection between their historical study and their wider liberal arts education. This project will be submitted as part of the course work for HIS 198.

The department’s second goal grows out of the creation of a new world history course, HIS 10 Perspectives on World History, which will begin being offered in the fall of 2004 as part of the new General Education program. Designed to fulfill the Common Contexts requirement in World Civilizations in Christian Perspective, the course will be taken by virtually all Westmont students and will be taught (eventually) by all members of the department. Because of its centrality to Westmont’s liberal arts curriculum and to how our department contributes to that curriculum, we believe it is vital that we concentrate our attention over the next few years on student outcomes from this course. The specific outcome goals identified above under number 2 are ones that we have agreed upon as appropriate for this course regardless of who teaches it and arise out of a larger template we have created for the course. Though obviously very broad in nature, these goals bespeak the department’s desire to have the course impact student content knowledge, skills, and character.

Assessment of student progress toward the outcome goals of the world history course will again be facilitated by the participation of multiple history department members (and perhaps some faculty from outside the department in team-teaching contexts) in the teaching of the course. Though individual faculty will have freedom to design many aspects of the course according to their own preferences, the course template will mean that on the whole, students should have a reasonably common experience in the class regardless of who teaches it. This includes how students will be assessed in the course. For example, all sections of the course will use primarily essay examinations to evaluate student content learning and analytical abilities. Similarly, all sections will include use of primary sources from a range of world cultures that students will be asked to read and write upon critically. We see this type of exercise as especially important in helping students to situate themselves culturally, economically, religiously, nationally, etc., as well as helping them to discover the challenge and complexity of understanding others well. Students will be encouraged to allow their interaction with other cultures to prompt personal reflection on their own values and world views. Faculty may assess that reflection in a variety of ways from classroom discussion to oral presentations and
student journals. More collective assessment by the department of student progress will occur through one department meeting per semester being devoted to discussion of the HIS 10 course. These meetings will occur after the return of student evaluations from the prior semester so that we may consider student feedback on the course on a regular basis.

We see these departmental goals as complementing and extending in several respects goals we established for ourselves in our departmental self-study in 2000 in relation to the six institutional learning standards. The desire to see our world history students cultivate a more thoughtful Christian world view and to demonstrate more mature Christian character traits echoes our stated aim in 2000 to “encourage students more overtly to practice Christian virtues in relation to one another” (Christian Orientation standard). Our goal to see world history students gain a deeper sense of their “historical location” and a greater appreciation for other world cultures corresponds to the aim we identified under the Diversity standard to broaden our course offerings in non-Western history for the sake of providing students with more opportunities to gain a global perspective on the past and present. Our goal to improve the competency of our majors in historical methods dovetails with our stated desire in the Self-Study to communicate better the distinctive qualities of historical study while also making more interdisciplinary links (Interdisciplinary-Critical Thinking standard). In light of these connections between our current departmental goals and ones earlier identified in relation to broader institutional learning standards, we believe achievement of these goals will serve our department, the college, and most importantly, our students very well.