

Department of History
Assessment Report for 2010
15 September 2010

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I. Mission statement, Student Learning Goals and Student Learning Outcomes

1. Mission Statement:

The History Department at Westmont believes that the study of the past is foundational for a thoughtful and compassionate life. We invite students to examine people, periods, and places that are very different from those they are familiar with, helping them to see how people are shaped by particular contexts. This process enables students to engage people and societies in the present with the sort of humility, empathy, and compassion to which Scripture calls us. The Perspectives on World History course is the core of our program for engaging the whole student body in this way of thinking, while our majors receive more detailed instruction on the practice of history and a deeper and broader understanding of global history. They also develop skills in reading, research, and writing that equip them for a range of careers. We want all our students to be fascinated by the past and to become more curious about the world, past and present.

2. Student Learning Outcomes (not revised since last report)

1. Historical Skills

1. Reading:

1. A History graduate should know how to **read a primary source** historically and critically. More particularly, they should be able to ask basic questions of the source; assess how their own background shapes their interpretation; and draw conclusions about the reliability and usefulness of the source.
2. Graduates should be able to **read books and articles by historians** with confidence and competence. More specifically, they should be able to classify a secondary source; summarize it; identify its main thesis or argument; engage in informed criticism; and make a final assessment of its value. These skills are important not only for written assignments, but also for class discussions.

2. **Research:** To be effective **historical researchers**, graduates must be able to select and appropriate research topic; locate relevant sources; and determine the character of the existing historiography on their topic.

3. **Writing:** To **write** a good history paper, graduates must be able to develop an argument; make use of different forms of historical writing; write in an

appropriate manner; and provide the requisite scholarly apparatus.

4. **Critical skills:** Students will exhibit a balance of healthy skepticism and interpretive confidence in their historical work

2. Historical Content

1. **Chronology:** Students will develop the ability to place important people, patterns and events in their proper chronological contexts. Understanding distinctions between ancient, medieval, early modern and modern periods while critically assessing such divisions of historical time are part of this skill package. The ability to locate such developments as agricultural and industrial revolutions, print media, empires and “ages” of imperialism, Reformation, Enlightenment, charismatic leaders, and the emergence of modern nation states are vital to a student’s grasp of historical chronology.
2. **Geography:** Through the study of maps and other descriptions of physical space, students will acquire an understanding of the physical world, its principal divisions (continents, territories, and other demarcations of land masses), and their unique characteristics as these have evolved over time. Students also will develop a sense of how geography has influenced the unique characteristics of human societies.
3. **Genres:** Students will understand the different types or approaches to history. This includes both content oriented and theoretical distinctions. Familiarity with important works in political, social, religious and economic history, as examples, acquaints students with wide ranging emphases in history, recognizing the contribution that each approach makes to the field. Exposure to imperialist, “whig,” feminist, post-colonial, Marxist, and/or postmodern approaches to historical writing is vital to understanding the different lenses through which historians examine the past.

3. Christian Orientation

1. **Faith and History:** Students will understand the value of historical study for Christians. In particular, they will consider the differences their Christian faith makes for their study of the past.
2. **Virtues:** Within and beyond the classroom, students will cultivate virtues essential to the study of history, including honesty, humility, and empathy.
3. **Christian Vocation:** Students will develop a sense of Christian vocation, drawing connections between their historical study and their responsibilities in the world.

4. **Life-Long Learning:** Students will develop into lovers of learning for the rest of their lives, certainly for their own sake, but also for the benefit of those around them, and ultimately, for the kingdom of God.

While the goals stated are clearly discipline specific, they are connected to several institutional learning goals. For the connection between the departmental goals and the institutional learning standards, please see the chart provided at the end of this report.

II. Follow up on action items (Note: Action items A-C are from our 2009 Assessment Report, and D is from the PRC Response).

- A. **External Reviewer:** The History Department will host Prof. David Diephouse during the last week of October 2010 to conduct a review of our department. On 13 September, members of our department will have an initial meeting to discuss how best to make use of this external review and how to structure it. We intend to meet as a department with Tatiana Nazarenko, Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness, to decide on an effective structure for Prof. Diephouse's visit. It should be noted that in inviting Prof. Diephouse to campus, we are addressing not only our ongoing needs for program review, but also a specific inquiry requested of Richard Pointer, the acting Provost. At a faculty senate meeting in the Spring of 2010, he urged department chairs to find ways of gauging how well our departments measure up in comparison to other departments of colleges of similar character and standing. As a senior professor at Calvin College, Prof. Diephouse is well positioned to help us address comparative questions relating to course offerings, student performance, and the overall mission and effectiveness of our department. We anticipate that his report will significantly influence the ways we assess our outcomes in years leading up to our 6 Year Report in 2012.
- B. **Thesis and argumentation for History 198:** Our 2009 assessment of senior papers for History 198 indicated that students needed to improve their ability to formulate a thesis and develop skills of historical argumentation. While these skills are taught in all of our courses, History 198 is the venue where we assess these skills most deliberately. In response to this need, Prof. Marianne Robins has devised a mentoring program, in which each 198 student is assigned a mentor in the department. The mentors have been given a mandate to assist students with the formulation of a thesis and the structuring and design of the paper to defend the thesis. Mentors, however, will not be reading the papers as such (so as not to overburden them) and will not be giving feedback on writing mechanics, etc. This will enhance support that each student will receive in the areas of greatest need, thesis formulation and argumentation. Prof. Robins has provided each faculty member with a checklist that holds each 198 student accountable for meeting with his/her mentor on a weekly basis. While students have been assigned to mentors in the past, this scheme formalizes the mentoring role and narrows the focus of mentors to the stated action items.

- C. **Improving grasp of Christian Liberal Arts:** History faculty will continue to take time in History 10 sections to enhance students' grasp and appreciation of a Christian Liberal Arts education. Our ability to collectively reflect and act on this matter has been impeded by Professor Robins's sabbatical in the Spring 2010 and Professor Richard Pointer's role as acting Provost. However, our department recognizes the need to enhance students' grasp of the Christian liberal arts beyond referencing its interdisciplinary dimension. Professor Mallampalli is using his discussions of Islam – particularly its claim on the whole of life of its devotees – as a platform to explore the unique manner in which the Gospel of Christ impacts the whole of human existence. How exactly do the Christian Liberal Arts express the comprehensive claims of Christ over all aspects of our lives and society? How might this differ from Islamic notions of submission? This question will come in the form of a written exercise. Professor Chapman notes that he “was more deliberate in defining some of the basic parameters” of a liberal arts education.” Through a series of conversations about current and historical events, Dr. Chapman continues to challenge students to reflect on how their education equips them - spiritually, intellectually, and vocationally - to relate to a complex world.
- D. **The PRC delivered its response to our 2009 report only on September 6, 2010.** We are encouraged by the report's many points of commendation about the History Department's ongoing assessment of its courses. Due to time constraints and our unique situation with staffing, we have been unable to reflect as a department on specific recommendations in the report. However, our departmental meetings in 2010-2011 academic year will involve discussions of the following:
- a. How best to make assessment sustainable by integrating it into our courses.
 - b. Incorporating college wide learning standards into our alignment chart.

III. Our Focus for 2010. Due to the unusual conditions of being without Professors Pointer and Robins in the Spring of 2010, we were unable to assess certain outcomes relating to skills in our History 10 and 198. We chose to focus on how well our majors grew in their understanding and appreciation for a Christian Liberal Arts education and its relationship to the study of History. Professors Mallampalli (chair) and Chapman met on May 11 (two days after commencement) to conceptualize the assessment exercise and in June to go over the results.

- A. We assessed **ten essays** submitted for History 198 in the Fall of 2010. The prompt for the essay asked students to address a broad range of issues. Still, we considered the essay to be a good opportunity to assess how much students have gained through their history major in terms of their grasp of the liberal arts and its Christian dimension. It was not easy to formulate a **departmental benchmark** for an assignment that covered so much ground. However, we hoped to see at least 70% of our students show evidence of growth in their understanding of a) the ties between Christianity and History, b) the Liberal

Arts, and c) ties between the Liberal Arts and History. We rated them in each area of the rubric as strong, satisfactory or unsatisfactory.

B. Interpretation of Results: The results of the assessment exercise indicate no uniform pattern of aptitude in any of the areas. Some essays contained traces of evidence of a “satisfactory” grasp of each area, while others showed evidence of both “satisfactory” and “unsatisfactory” elements. Only one student demonstrated a uniformly “strong” grasp of “Christianity and History,” but the same student was rated as “satisfactory” in her grasp of the “Liberal Arts.” There are also instances in which the professors clearly held different impressions as to how to rate a student in any of the three areas. For instance, Mallampalli rated the essay written by “D.Y.,” as strong in “Christianity and History” and “Liberal Arts”, but only satisfactory in “Liberal Arts and History.” Chapman, on the other hand, identified “unsatisfactory” elements in all three areas, while also rating the essay “strong” in at least one aspect of “Liberal Arts.” The two assessors are in agreement, however, that there were very few students who demonstrated a strong grasp of any of the three areas.

C. Response: Part of the difficulty of assessing this particular outcome relates to its intangible and unquantifiable nature. Students can demonstrate integrative thinking and mature reflection without explicitly invoking the idiom of Christian Liberal Arts educational theory (if there is such a thing). Moreover, inconsistencies between the prompt and the rubric made it difficult to fault students for not revealing knowledge they were not explicitly asked to produce for the exercise. The rubric, for instance, asked students to discuss virtues, while the rubric did not address virtues per se. The prompt invited students to reflect broadly about how they grew during their time at Westmont, their significant learning moments, and hindrances to learning. The rubric was more focused on the Christian Liberal Arts questions. In sum, the prompt gave students considerable leeway in deciding what the dominant focus of their essays would be. In the future, a simpler rubric may be required, as well as greater consistency between the prompt and the rubric. It may also be the case that more narrative and impressionistic types of assessment need to be employed to measure these less tangible and abstract aspects of their education at Westmont. Considering the deliberate focus of the History Department on the theme of the Christian Liberal Arts, the lackluster results of this assessment may have more to do with the exercise and the measurement than with any major problems with pedagogy in 198 or other courses.

IV. Next Steps: Over the next couple of years, the History Department looks forward to taking several key steps toward improving the effectiveness of its program. Three areas should become our priority: 1) Finding ways of assessing its “Content” outcome. Several meetings are required in order to how best to assess geography, chronology and genres. 2) Discussing results of the external

review to be conducted by Prof. David Diephouse and formulating other goals based on his review, 3) Conducting a study of our alumni, to determine how well their history major has equipped them for vocational choices and satisfaction, and 4) Discussing ways of improving the design and effectiveness of our History 10 course, particularly with a view to making its assessment clear, consistent across courses (and professors) and sustainable. A challenge for assessing this broad General Education course relates to identifying “core content” while recognizing the unique priorities, approaches and emphases of each professor. In the past, we have floated the idea of team teaching History 10. It is conceivable that a team taught History 10 would provide a way to preserve distinctive styles, priorities and approaches of the professors while identifying core content, since each team teaching professor would identify what is core for his or her section of the course.

In anticipation of the 6-year report, our department must devise a way of sharing responsibilities and oversight for the next steps, and a timeline for addressing them.

V. Appendices

A. Last year’s response from the PRC.

Summary Statement

Thank you for the important role you played in completing the Annual Assessment Report for the History Department. Your department continues to evidence consistent and exemplary application of sound assessment practices. Your mission statement and clear statement of student learning outcomes have served as a foundation for these efforts. In addition, the chart on page 8 effectively demonstrates the linkages of the learning outcomes, the classes offered that embed the outcomes, and the means of assessment.

Commendations

- The history department continues to evidence strong collaboration among the faculty in the department in creating/modifying the assessment plan, sharing of the assessment workload, and determining how the results of assessment are used to impact student learning.
- The department has addressed the problem noted in the 2006-2008 Annual September 15 Report related to the History 10 assessment. At that time, the report noted that “each professor adopted a different method for measuring improvement” in students’ understanding of Christian Liberal Arts. This year’s report noted that all three History 10 professors met to develop a single instrument to measure the students’ grasp of the Christian Liberal Arts.
- The interpretation of the assessment results related to the understanding of Christian Liberal Arts resulted in specific observations by each faculty member and offered ideas of how content and methodology could be adapted to improve

student understanding. This is an excellent example of “closing the loop” to make use of the assessment process.

- Strong departmental collaboration was again evidenced when the department gathered to collectively review 13 papers from HIS 198. There seems to be confidence that the rubric you are using allows you to tease out the six important learning outcomes. Most important was the fact that as the results were interpreted, professors noted specific areas to give greater emphasis in the coming year.
- A new aspect of your assessment effort was to include an outside reader, Dr. Paul Wilt, in the assessment of the best History 198 paper.
- The history department has clearly refined the assessment plan by building on previous work and seeking feedback.

Questions/observations/suggestions

- Have the assessment efforts in the history department become more and more a part of your teaching and therefore sustainable over the foreseeable future?
- As you have become more confident in the rubrics you are using as a department, do you plan on tracking student learning achievement longitudinally?
- Although aspects of the college-wide learning standards are clearly part of your departmental learning outcomes, they are not highlighted to the outside reader in the chart on page 8.
- The chart on page 8 also points toward future work to be completed in developing departmental benchmarks. The Program Review Committee looks forward to seeing the benchmarks that are developed.
- You mention that you intend to invite an outside reviewer, perhaps from a History Department at a sister institution, to offer perspective on the program at Westmont. The Program Review Committee encourages the use of external reviews. The division of Student Life seeks to do an external review of one of our departments every year. I would welcome an opportunity to share how we have organized such visits if that would be helpful.

Thank you, Chandra, for your role along with the efforts of the entire History Department for the important progress being made in strengthening the college through assessment and program review.

B. Prompt for essay used for 2010 assessment exercise:
Final Essay -5 to 7 pages

1 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor

and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,
3 and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the LORD
for the display of his splendor.

How have you grown during your time at Westmont, and in particular, how has your work as a student of history and of the liberal arts contributed to this growth?

So as well as reflecting broadly on your time at Westmont, you should write about:

- Why should Christians be interested in the past? And in the writing of history? What virtues has the study of history helped you to develop?
- In what ways has a liberal arts curriculum helped you to grow?
- Why does history have an important place in a liberal arts curriculum and therefore in the life of an educated person (like you)?
- What have you learned that mean you will be able to win the “favor” of people after graduation?
- What have been some of the most significant learning moments during your time as a history major?
- What, if anything, has hindered your learning and growing?

C. Rubric used:

	Excellent	Good	Unsatisfactory
Christianity and History	Displays strong sense of why Christians should be interested in the past, providing several reasons. Emphasizes the importance of history for developing a variety of Christian virtues.	Displays clear sense of why Christians should be interested in the past, providing two or three reasons. Mentions the importance of history for developing at least one Christian virtue.	Displays little sense of why Christians should be interested in the past, providing at most one reason. Fails to mention the way that history is important for the development of Christian virtue.
Liberal Arts	Has a clear understanding of the nature of a liberal arts education. Articulates	Has a hazy understanding of the nature of a liberal arts education. Mentions at	Has a poor understanding of the nature of a liberal arts education. Has no clear

	specific ways in which a liberal arts education has helped them to mature.	least one way in which a liberal arts education has helped them to mature.	idea of how their education might have helped them to mature.
Liberal Arts and History	Provides a compelling explanation of why history has an important place in a liberal arts curriculum.	Is able to explain why history has an important place in a liberal arts curriculum.	Is not able to explain why history has an important place in a liberal arts curriculum.

E. Updated Multi-year Plan

Outcomes	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-2011	2011-2012	Means
1. Skills ○ Reading: a. Primary Sources b. Secondary Sources ○ Research ○ Writing ○ Critical skills	 	 					HIS 198 Senior Seminar papers HIS 001 Papers (writing) HIS 186 Papers (secondary sources) HIS 121 Papers (primary sources)
2. Content ○ Chronology ○ Geography ○ Genre		 	 				HIS 010 Pre and Post tests (writing)
3. Christian Orientation ○ History and the Christian Faith ○ Virtues ○ Vocation ○ Life-long learning		 		 	 		HIS 198 Presentations (Fall and Spring) (vocation and faith)

Questions:

Given the goals we want to list, how will we assess them, particularly in 08-09?

What is our long-term plan?