

# Annual Assessment Report

**Department: History**  
**Academic Year: 2023-24**  
**Date of Submission: September 16, 2024**  
**Department Chair: Alister Chapman**

## I. Response to the previous year PRC’s recommendations

<b>Item:</b> Discuss evidence from previous assessed papers.	<b>Response:</b> We have discussed what we have found as a result of these assessments as we have done them. We have not, however, as yet done a longitudinal study of possible change over time. This was made more difficult in Spring 2024 because only two members of the department were present on campus.
<b>Item:</b> Closing the loop activities.	<b>Response:</b> We have continued with our consistent work of teaching how to write and make strong arguments, in HIS99 (Foundations of History), HIS198 (Senior Seminar Capstone), and other courses. Dr. Alastair Su is teaching the senior seminar for the first time this Fall, and Dr. Heather Keaney is teaching HIS99 for the first time in a long time in Spring 2025. This has produced a series of conversations between these two faculty and Drs. Marianne Robins and Chapman, who have taught these two courses more often. Dr. Su is already implementing new approaches in HIS198 (including inviting some recent alumni to speak to the class who have done the course before, refining the historiographical assignment to encourage them to engage arguments sooner, and bringing his quantitative expertise in economic history for the benefit of our students), and we are confident that Dr. Keaney will do the same. It would be good to discuss changes that they have made as part of our Seven Year Report.
<b>Item:</b>	<b>Response:</b>
<b>Item:</b>	<b>Response:</b>
<b>Notes:</b>	

## II A. Program Learning Outcome (PLO) assessment

If your department participated in the ILO assessment you may use this section to report on your student learning in relation to the assessed ILO. The assessment data can be requested from the Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness.

<b>Program Learning Outcome</b>	In 2023-24, our department focused on the World History in Christian Perspective GE Learning Outcome: “Students will acquire literacy in the histories of diverse peoples across the globe and reflect on the importance of world history for the Christian.” Given that in past years we have assessed student learning on the first part of this outcome, this year we decided to focus on the second. We did this partly because we had planned to as a department, and partly to support the collegewide institutional assessment of global learning.																																										
<b>Who is in Charge /Involved?</b>	Dr. Chapman led this effort as chair; Dr. Keaney and Dr. Robins were also very involved. In Fall 2023, all three were teaching HIS10 Perspectives on World History—the one course on campus that satisfies the World History in Christian Perspective requirement. Dr. Ryan Minor was also teaching HIS10 in Fall 2023, but because his final exam did not include an essay component, we did not ask him to participate.																																										
<b><u>Direct Assessment Methods</u></b>	In Fall 2023, we each assigned the same short-essay question as part of our final exams. The question was: “Why is it important for Christians to study world history? Provide specific examples as part of your answer.” We drew up a rubric to assess what the students wrote, and marked student essays accordingly. (The rubric is pasted in this file in Appendix B.)																																										
<b><u>Indirect Assessment Methods</u></b>																																											
<b>Major Findings</b>	<p>The table below provides the raw results of our assessment.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="375 974 1570 1339"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th><b>Superior</b></th> <th><b>Good</b></th> <th><b>Fair</b></th> <th><b>Inadequate</b></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td rowspan="4"><i>Understanding of the relationship between Christianity and global history</i></td> <td>HIS10-1: 14</td> <td>HIS10-1: 10</td> <td>HIS10-1: 2</td> <td>HIS10-1: 0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>HIS10-3: 2</td> <td>HIS10-3: 10</td> <td>HIS10-3: 12</td> <td>HIS10-3: 1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>HIS10-4: 20</td> <td>HIS10-4: 7</td> <td>HIS10-4: 3</td> <td>HIS10-4: 0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>HIS10-6: 6</td> <td>HIS10-6: 17</td> <td>HIS10-6: 8</td> <td>HIS10-6: 1</td> </tr> <tr> <td rowspan="4"><i>Ability to provide historical examples to support argument</i></td> <td>HIS10-1: 2</td> <td>HIS10-1: 7</td> <td>HIS10-1: 8</td> <td>HIS10-1: 8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>HIS10-3: 5</td> <td>HIS10-3: 6</td> <td>HIS10-3: 9</td> <td>HIS10-3: 5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>HIS10-4: 9</td> <td>HIS10-4: 7</td> <td>HIS10-4: 12</td> <td>HIS10-4: 2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>HIS10-6: 7</td> <td>HIS10-6: 12</td> <td>HIS10-6: 2</td> <td>HIS10-6: 11</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>The results show that 76% of our students showed a superior or good “understanding of the relationship between</p>					<b>Superior</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Inadequate</b>	<i>Understanding of the relationship between Christianity and global history</i>	HIS10-1: 14	HIS10-1: 10	HIS10-1: 2	HIS10-1: 0	HIS10-3: 2	HIS10-3: 10	HIS10-3: 12	HIS10-3: 1	HIS10-4: 20	HIS10-4: 7	HIS10-4: 3	HIS10-4: 0	HIS10-6: 6	HIS10-6: 17	HIS10-6: 8	HIS10-6: 1	<i>Ability to provide historical examples to support argument</i>	HIS10-1: 2	HIS10-1: 7	HIS10-1: 8	HIS10-1: 8	HIS10-3: 5	HIS10-3: 6	HIS10-3: 9	HIS10-3: 5	HIS10-4: 9	HIS10-4: 7	HIS10-4: 12	HIS10-4: 2	HIS10-6: 7	HIS10-6: 12	HIS10-6: 2	HIS10-6: 11
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Christianity and global history, and 49% of our students showed a superior or good “ability to provide historical examples to support [their] argument.”

We were pleased with the 76% who did a good or better job of explaining the relationship between Christianity and the study of history. This strongly suggests that they are accomplishing the GE outcome of “reflect[ing] on the importance of world history for the Christian.” It was especially pleasing that many students were able to make several connections on this score. Most commonly, students connected world history to Christian truths about creation, fall, and redemption; to theological ideas such as shalom and common grace; to creation care; to love of neighbour; to human beings created in the image of God; and to virtues such as humility and empathy.

We did not include a measure of inter-rater reliability in this semester, in large part because of overlapping sabbaticals for two out of the three faculty involved in this assessment. We did discuss the divergences in scores between the different sections. Part of the challenge for the first criterion especially was determining what merited a “point”—Dr. Chapman (who taught sections 1 and 4) was more satisfied with a student mentioning, say, that humanity is made in God’s image, while his more intellectually and theologically rigorous peers wanted more development of the idea before they counted it. This led to a fruitful discussion of what the bar should be for this course, in which we concluded that we should be grateful for even a rudimentary grasp of some of these concepts in an introductory course like this, while also pushing for more. We certainly hope that there is further development of these ideas in other courses that they take at Westmont.

Students were not as able to provide historical examples for the points that they made. We are not sure why this was. It may have been a time issue in the exam—this question was just one short essay worth 10% of the exam, and so students may not have applied themselves to it as much as they might have. It may be that we need to spend more time in class connecting specific parts of the historical narrative that each of our courses provide to specific virtues or theological points. Some of the challenge is that doing the latter could easily feel forced.

Thankfully, the first part of our rubric—understanding the relationship between Christianity and history—which had the better scores, is the one at the core of the second half of the learning outcome that we were assessing this year--“Students will acquire literacy in the histories of diverse peoples across the globe and reflect on the importance of world history for the Christian.” We did not set a benchmark before the assessment, but we are pleased with 76% of our students were in the superior or good categories.

**Closing the**

We have made the following changes.

<b>Loop Activities</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dr. Robins is assigning Shirley Mullen’s <i>The Courageous Middle</i>, with accompanying assignments and discussions, to help students think better about global and social engagement as Christians.</li> <li>2. Dr. Keaney is going to emphasize the importance of note taking more, to ensure that students hold on to relevant theological-historical discussions from class.</li> <li>3. Dr. Chapman is revising his HIS10 Perspectives class during his Spring 2025 sabbatical, and this will be a focus.</li> <li>4. Dr. Robins is including an essay on the Christian liberal arts to her final exams.</li> <li>5. We are committed to continuing to find ways to incorporate this learning outcome into our classes in ways that connect it to the historical material (as has been our historic practice), rather than as stand-alone discussions.</li> </ol>
<b>Collaboration and Communication</b>	

or/and

**II B. Key Questions**

<b>Key Question</b>	How to respond as a department to the emergence of LLM tools such as ChatGPT.
<b>Who is in Charge/Involved?</b>	Dr. Chapman took a modest lead on this as department chair, but all were involved. Dr. Su in particular made significant contributions to this assessment.
<b><u>Direct Assessment Methods</u></b>	
<b><u>Indirect Assessment Methods</u></b>	
<b>Major Findings</b>	<p>We did not do any assessment related to this key question—apart from assessing whether our students were indeed using LLMs in untoward ways! Rather, we exchanged numerous articles as a department and had conversations about how to respond to these new technologies.</p> <p>We are not throwing up our hands. Human writing will still be important. However, we do need to find new ways to communicate the importance of learning how to write to students, and help them to use AI in ways that will be constructive.</p>

<b>Recommendations</b>	<p>This conversation will be ongoing. It may be one of our key questions for the next review cycle.</p> <p>However, after one particular conversation in April 2023 with Drs. Keaney, Su, and Chapman, Dr. Chapman revised some of his material on writing skills in HIS99 Foundations of History accordingly, encouraging students to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use it (a total ban is unrealistic, and AI tools can help generate good ideas).</li> <li>2. Know when you are using it (i.e. be careful with tools that may not advertise themselves as using AI, such as some versions of Grammarly).</li> <li>3. Document it.</li> <li>4. Learn to write—AI is like using a microwave, but eventually you will wish you had learned how to cook on a stove!</li> <li>5. Recognize limitations, notably that AI tools can't do research and can't identify wrong information.</li> <li>6. Be aware that AI may get less useful over time, with AI using AI-produced sources (cannibalization), and fewer sources available as publishers work to protect their intellectual property.</li> </ol>
<b>Collaboration and Communication</b>	

### III. Follow-ups

<b>Program Learning Outcome or Key Question</b>	See discussions above under IIA Closing the Loop Activities and IIB Major Findings, where we discuss these points.
<b>Who was involved in implementation?</b>	

What was decided or addressed?	
How were the recommendations implemented?	
<b>Collaboration and Communication</b>	

**IV. Other assessment or Key Questions related projects**

<b>Project</b>	We started work on our Seven Year Report.
<b>Who is in Charge /Involved?</b>	<p>Alistar Chapman worked with the Dean’s office to conduct the alumni survey.</p> <p>Alistar Chapman and Heather Keaney met for a day in May to discuss and draft the student learning section of the Seven Year Report (B1).</p> <p>Analee Josselyn, the history student worker, collected comparative data on history programmes at other institutions.</p> <p>The whole department met for a workday in August to discuss the survey results and data on other departments. We also discussed our curriculum and sustainability, and began the process of writing the report.</p>
<b>Major Findings</b>	Find out next September!
<b>Action</b>	Marianne Robins is working with the department this year to bring our Report to its triumphant conclusion.
<b>Collaboration and Communication</b>	

**V. Adjustments to the Multi-year Assessment Plan (optional)**

Proposed adjustment	Rationale	Timing

**VI. Appendices**

- A. Prompts or instruments used to collect the data
- B. Rubrics used to evaluate the data
- C. Relevant assessment-related documents (optional)

**Appendix B**

Rubric for assessment world history essays.

	Superior	Good	Fair	Inadequate
<i>Understanding of the relationship between Christianity and global history</i>	Provided 2 or more reasons for why Christians should study world history and was able to ground them clearly in particular aspects of Christian theology.	Provided 2-3 reasons for why Christians should study world history, but the theological grounding for the explanations was not strong.	Provided 1-2 reasons for why Christians should study world history, and the theological grounding for the explanations was not strong.	Provided no reasons for why Christians should study world history.
<i>Ability to provide historical examples to support argument</i>	Provided clear historical examples to support each point.	Provided clear historical examples to support most points.	Historical examples were inaccurate, vague, or not tied to specific points.	Provided no historical examples.