

## Form E-1-A for Boston College Core Curriculum

Department/Program - May 29, 2019

### Department of History/Core

- 1) **Have formal learning outcomes for the department's Core courses been developed? What are they?** (What specific sets of skills and knowledge does the department expect students completing its Core courses to have acquired?)

Over the past several years the History Department has developed two learning outcomes salient to all History Core courses, regardless of subject matter. Through the History Core, students will know how to:

- 1) use primary sources to interpret the past
- 2) explain change over time

While these remain our discipline's fundamental analytical tools, the Core Committee is considering the specification of perhaps one or two additional outcomes that address our overarching ethos about developing global perspectives on the past, particularly in light of the new History Core course offerings we have added in the past few years that focus on African diaspora, colonial Latin America, environmental crisis in the modern world, as well as social and religious marginality in the premodern world. As the department develops this new range of courses that satisfy the History Core requirements, it seems a good moment to consider additional stated outcomes that encapsulates the skills and knowledge students gain beyond the two central outcomes that we have isolated.

- 2) **Where are these learning outcomes published? Be specific.** (Where are the department's expected learning outcomes for its Core courses accessible: on the web, in the catalog, or in your department handouts?)

The learning outcomes have been posted on the History Department Core website. In addition, the learning outcomes have been printed in the syllabi for all History Core courses. As we move forward with developing new methods of accessing our students we are considering new methods for publishing learning outcomes, for instance via the department's growing roster of social media outlets (Facebook, Instagram, and our new WordPress blog).

**Other than GPA, what data/evidence is used to determine whether students have achieved the stated outcomes for the Core requirement?** (What evidence and analytical approaches do you use to assess which of the student learning outcomes have been achieved more or less well?)

In the past direct assessment of the learning outcomes was undertaken by instructors and teaching assistants using a quantitative scale. The assessment rubric consists of two questions, each of which were rated on a five-point scale.

- 1) Please rate the student's ability to make meaningful connections between a variety of primary sources.
- 2) Please rate the student's ability to produce a written or verbal interpretive narrative of historical events.

After several years of collecting this data, the Core Committee has decided to pause the process and devise better and perhaps more holistic means of assessment. The results from our data gathering proved consistently similar (4.1 or 4.2 on a 5-point scale), i.e., "very good but not perfect." This more or less reinforced what we already knew. Accordingly, the Core Committee will be focusing in the coming year on developing a revised method for assessing students experience with the History Core, encompassing both skills mastery and more fundamental questions of personal development and formation, centering on the development of a global perspective on the past. We anticipate data will still be collected, as we have collected it in the past, via Canvas (Boston College's web-based learning management system). Whereas we relied exclusively for direct assessment in previous years on one final assignment (typically, a final exam or paper) of the instructor's choice, we are considering a slightly more detailed polling instrument. For Students' indirect assessment, we used an online questionnaire, but the patchy responses urge reconsideration. We may resort to devising a set of standard additional questions to add to all History Core course student evaluations. The Core Committee plans to work over the summer and the early part of the autumn term on getting a revamped set of tools for assessing assessment ready to roll out for use at least in the spring term of the next AY.

- 3) **Who interprets the evidence? What is the process?** (Who in the department is responsible for interpreting the data and making recommendations for curriculum or assignment changes if appropriate? When does this occur?)

Initial data analysis for direct assessment has for the past few years been out by the Center for Teaching Excellence at Boston College. The department's Core committee, in consultation with the department chair, then undertook secondary analysis and interpretation of direct assessment data and conducts the analysis of indirect assessment data. Data and conclusions were then shared with the History faculty for consideration and debate. After the adjustments made to our instruments indicated above, we anticipate that a similar process will be followed in the future.

- 4) **What were the assessment results and what changes have been made as a result of using this data/evidence?** (What were the major assessment findings? Have there been any recent changes to your curriculum or program? How did the assessment data contribute to those changes?)

Since beginning assessment in the spring of 2015, the department and Core committee has

- 1) developed a simplified quantitative rubric for 2016 and beyond;
- 2) included learning outcomes to Core syllabi;

- 3) held more frequent meetings on the reasoning and methods behind assessment for Core faculty and TAs; and,
- 4) directly and indirectly assessed all Core courses.

Direct assessment data from 2016-18 suggested stability in successfully meeting learning outcomes. A vast majority of our students are performing at or above baseline competency for the learning outcomes listed above.

In 2016, the mean for student ability to make meaningful connections through primary sources was 3.97 (out of 5), and for student ability to provide an interpretive narrative was 4.1 (out of 5). While the overall score for change over time was higher than use of primary sources, this was not necessarily the case for individual classes. In 2017, the mean for student ability to make meaningful connections was 4.2 and the ability to provide an interpretive narrative was 4.1. The 0.1 difference between the two scores is not statistically significant. In 2018, scores remained steady, with primary source analysis at 4.1 and interpretive narrative at 4.2.

The minor differences from year to year do not appear to be significant and show instead a general baseline for student achievement within the Core overall. From year to year individual courses do show statistically significant variations from one another in regards to student achievement. The assessment measures in place cannot tell us why, however. Different results could result from one or a variety of factors including, but not limited to, student preparation (which itself consists of variety of factors such as quality of high school education, majoring in an allied field, time available for study, emotional wellness, and economic security), class size, reporter bias, or method of instruction.

*Recommendations:*

Data from 2016-18 are the baseline for continuing assessment of History Core courses that will operate on an increasing variety of pedagogical models. To date, however, no conclusive results suggest that one specific type of course (based on content or number of students) is consistently more effective than another. Even with longitudinal data, such a question may be impossible to answer as there is as of yet no mechanism to measure students' readiness for the courses in which they enroll.

Here again, we see grounds for exploring new methods for accessing the Core that might paint a broader picture. The Core Committee, working in conjunction with the CTE, may want to pilot statistical sampling of all Core courses. Random sampling may eliminate the need for comprehensive data collection and may allow for a greater variety of factors to be measured. Secondly, it is important to integrate data collection on traditional Core courses with the department's offerings in the internal "History Core Topics" model, and as part of the renewed Core.

- 6) **Date of the most recent program review.** (Your latest comprehensive departmental self-study and external review.)

Direct and indirect assessments were carried out in May 2018. The most recent external review of the Core came as part of the general external review of the History Department in 2011-12.