III. History Discipline Goals and Action Steps

The History discipline’s goals and action steps are drawn from our teaching experience as well as the assessment data of indirect evidence (provided by OIE) and direct evidence (pre- and post-tests in our lower-level survey courses and research essays in our upper-level courses).

OIE data shows that our total number of majors and minors has not varied much since our last review (2006); the number of History graduates has remained stable; the discipline has scored at or above the college average on SOOTS in all semesters except one; and we have been at or above the college average in virtually all of the 21 SOOTS categories. The Current Student Survey shows that the discipline performs at or above the College level in all categories, with some below-average scores at “two years post-graduate” but above average scores at “six years post-graduate.” In the Senior Survey, the discipline was at or above the College average in 20 of 24 categories (i.e., slightly lower in the areas of class size, ability to find faculty/staff, opportunity to discuss class work outside of class, opportunity to apply learning to the real world.)

Direct evidence derived from pre- and post-tests reveals the expected increase in knowledge of the subjects taught, while research essays in upper-level electives show that the vast majority of our students have achieved virtually all of the desired learning outcomes. Students have shown a marked improvement since 2006 in reaching a logical and critical understanding of the past using the historical method. The only exception to this record of success is in the area of analyzing primary sources, in which a bare majority (58%) has attained an adequate level of understanding. This remains, as it was in 2006, an area of concern for the discipline.

(1) Goal One: Improve students’ skills in primary source analysis.

Action Step: Introduce a new course for the major in historiography and history methods. Such a course will likely be added to the major requirements, resulting in an 11-course major. The History discipline needs to decide when such a course should optimally be taken during a student’s four-year career. Drs. Kramer and Lamar have agreed to teach the course on a rotating basis, but we have not yet decided whether it will be offered every fall or every spring. The actual organization of the course is (naturally) still uncertain. While History has already made a major purchase for the library using NEH funds, we will require an expanded library budget to order additional materials appropriate to such a course. The discipline will need to determine whether the increased library funding can come from the NEH grant or some other source.

Within the next year, the History discipline will meet regularly to discuss these issues and seek to resolve them. Barring a major disruption of our discipline by the revised General Education program, we should
begin offering the new course in the near future, well within the next five years. Numbers in the OIE assessment data and direct evidence data that have prompted our concern about primary source analysis should improve as a result of this course.

(2) Goal Two: Enhance the discipline’s ability to teach effectively with new technologies.

Action Step: Seek a closer relationship with the technology support staff at the College, including arranging training workshops for our faculty as well as appointing a contact person (e.g., a student tech assistant) who faculty might contact on short notice. If additional funding is required to expand the role of our discipline’s student assistant, we will seek this funding in meetings with the divisional Associate Dean.

Within the next year, the History discipline will meet regularly to discuss this issue and seek to resolve it.

(3) Goal Three: Invite an outside reviewer to evaluate our discipline.

Action step: The discipline will contact the review bureau of the American Historical Association to inquire about reviewers from a liberal arts college with a national reputation. The expense for such an outside review will need to be discussed with several members of the College, including the Associate Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness, the A.D. for Humanities and Fine Arts, and the Academic Vice President.

Within the next year, the History discipline will meet to discuss the funding and timing of an outside review. We anticipate having such a review within the next four years, i.e., prior to our next review cycle.