

Form E-1-A for Boston College Core Curriculum

Department of History

- 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?)

The Core Committee in the History Department has worked with colleagues to develop learning outcomes for all of the Core course that are taught in the department. This includes the traditional surveys, Core 'Topics' courses and the courses that fall under the rubric of Core renewal courses. The specific skills we expect students to attain are 1) learning how to use primary sources to understand and interpret the past, 2) be able to explain change over time.

- 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?)

At the moment the learning outcomes are posted on the department's website. There is a section on the website that is dedicated to the Core program in the Department of History. This contains information about the Core, FAQs and the learning outcomes. Our department also now has a blog, BC History News, which provides comprehensive and updated information to undergraduates about the department: <https://bchistorynews.wordpress.com/> We have found that social media such as this site helps a great deal in connecting with students and disseminating key information about Core offerings, objectives, and the History Department in general.

- 3) **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 previous years, engaged in direct assessment of the learning outcomes by professors and their teaching assistants, who were asked to provide answers on a 1-5 point scale. Faculty and teaching assistants rated the student's abilities in two domains key to our discipline and connected to our principal learning outcomes as advertised on websites and on History Core instructors' syllabi: 1) making meaningful connections between a variety of primary sources and 2) producing written or verbal interpretive narrative of historical events.

As noted in last year's E1A, we collected this data several years running and got almost exactly the same "good but not perfect" results, specifically 4.1 or 4.2 on a 5-point scale. These numbers more or less reinforced what we already knew. In response, and hoping to devise an instrument to better capture not acquisition of tangible skills but also more holistic learning outcomes – for instance, gaining a broader sense of history that furnished critical context for analyzing contemporary problems -- the Core Committee began a conversation in Summer 2019 about revising our assessment structure and instrument.

Unfortunately, those plans got thwarted by serious obstacles beyond our control. The first challenge came in the form of a local disaster: the departure of our primary administrative assistant, Colleen O'Reilly, in July 2019. We needed all departmental hands on deck just to keep moving forward at all with regular business; so, unfortunately, large-scale rethinks such as we had planned for the History Core needed to be at a minimum scaled back significantly. Core Director Rob Savage and Chairperson Sarah Ross then formulated a more modest beginning, a the plan to get at least new *indirect* assessment of student learning experiences in the Core, by adding a few questions to that end on Core evaluations for Spring 2020. Then came a global disaster: Covid-19 and the disruptions ensuing meant that even this modest plan needed to be shelved, in the service of the mad dash to remote instruction and the distinct challenges for all instructors with that alone.

- 4) **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?)

In past years, the History Core committee has examined the feedback from instructors and TAs, in consultation with the department chair. We also obtained indirect assessment on the same metrics from students. We shared the results with the department in an effort to gain feedback and ideas for developing new means of assessment.

Our initiatives going forward, and the work of interpretation, will be in the hands of incoming Core Director, Zachary Matus. While a member of the Core Committee a few years ago, Matus developed the instrument discussed below (item 5). He will be ideally positioned, then, to take us into a new phase of rethinking and developing assessment tools under the leadership of incoming Chairperson Prasannan Parthasarathi.

- 5) **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?)

We initiated a rebooted form of assessment in the spring of 2015, and since that time the Core Committee and the department have

- 1) developed a simplified quantitative rubric for 2016-2018;
- 2) included learning outcomes to Core syllabi and the department's website
- 3) Consulted with colleagues on conducting assessment
- 4) directly and indirectly assessed all Core courses.

Over the past year the Core in history has evolved. We have introduced a variety of new 'Core Topics' courses in an effort to engage more faculty in teaching the Core. This innovation is on-going, but to date we have been successful in encouraging a number of faculty to teach these

'Topics' courses. As we find ways to develop new courses that work with the University's goal as outlined in the Core renewal it will be important to explore new methods for accessing all of the Core course taught in the department.

Though thwarted in our aim to make tracks on that exploration this year by the challenges noted before, we are now planning, as part of a larger rethink of how we conduct direct assessment for the Undergraduate Program as a whole, to consult with Jess Greene in the Provost's Office. Greene was suggested to us by Dean Kalscheur as an expert guide for thinking in new ways about conducting direct assessment, both logistically and in capturing how well students in our Core (and Undergrad) curricula develop in their learning beyond disciplinary skills as such, i.e., in what ways History courses further students' formation and meet BC's overarching teaching and learning goals. We anticipate a period in which the new Core Committee in particular will do a self-study, considering how to frame those broader aims, get them more clearly stated in all informational outlets, and then more regularly and directly measured.

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.