

Ohlone College Program Review 2005-2006

Program/Discipline: History and Political Science

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## **1. Program Description and Scope<sup>1</sup>**

The Department offers courses for transfer students, for students in two year terminal programs and for community residents seeking self improvement and intellectual stimulation. All courses offered in the History/Political Science area (henceforth to be referred to as “history”) are transferable to the California State University System. Most are transferable to the University of California. In addition to the standard classes in United States History, California History, A History of Western Civilization with a World Perspective, and American Government, courses are presented in International Relations, Comparative Government, African American History, a History of the Asian American, Comparative World Civilizations, American Civilization and 20th Century U.S. History. We also offer course in popular culture such as A History of Rock and Roll. The Department cross-references courses with other areas in Chicano History, History of Film, and a the History of Trends in Music Literature.

There are many disciplines in which the answers to questions can be presented in a straightforward, unambiguous manner—history is not one of these. Unlike statistics, chemistry, or mathematics, where there is usually only one generally accepted answer to any question, in history there is usually many ways that one can understand, explain, and interpret the past. It is therefore necessary to choose from the array of possibilities and determine which one is most compelling. This choice should be based on a solid understanding of the questions, issues, and evidence available. The History/Political Science Department at Ohlone College provides students with the basic skills needed to accomplish this task. Ultimately, our goal is that they will come to appreciate and perhaps heed George Santayana’s well-known warning, “Those who fail to learn from history are destined to repeat it.”

The study of history is vital to a college education. Historians insist that the past be studied and understood on its own terms. Therefore, any historical phenomenon—an event, an idea, or a law—must first be understood in its historical context, and as part of a web of interrelated institutions, values, and beliefs unique to a particular culture and era. Among the liberal arts and social sciences, history is the discipline most concerned with understanding change. Instructors in the department seek not only to explain historical causality—how and why change occurs within societies and cultures—they also strive to explain the endurance of tradition, to understand the complex interplay between continuity and change, and to trace the origins, evolution, and decline of various institutions and ideas.

**Staff Changes:** The department is currently adjusting to changes in full-time staffing. Darren Bardell was hired in 2004 and teaches four courses: H117A, H117B, H142, H118. We are currently engaged in a national search for Howard DeWitt’s replacement. S/he will begin full-time duties in the Fall of 2006.

**Cohort groups:** Within the context of the college’s Title III project, our department participates in the University Express program offering H117a every Fall Semester. A section of 117a is

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<sup>1</sup> Several of my formulations regarding the importance of historical scholarship were adapted from a speech delivered by: Professor Frank Luttmer, “The Devil, History, and Studia Humanitatis,” Mortar Board Lecture, Hanover College, 25 March 1999. The full speech can be found at: <<http://history.hanover.edu/news/11f199.html>>

available online so the potential is there for a totally online University Express cohort group. Under the direction of the Dean, this should be a reality by the Fall of 2006.

Online Education: Darren Bardell has developed two online sections of history 117a and 117b. Both are offered in the Spring and Fall semesters. Alan Kirshner is currently updating his former PS102 online course for next year. In the near future, Bardell and Kirshner will team-up to offer a fully online General Education Plan B (Area C). Howard DeWitt continues to teach two sections of his "History of Rock and Roll" course in retirement (one online, one self-paced).

Web Enhanced Courses: Both Howard DeWitt and Alan Kirshner are pioneers in Online or Web-Based learning. For the past 10 plus years, Alan has both taught online courses and developed his own (self-managed) general web site, for students in all of his sections. Utilizing Web CT, Darren Bardell offers all of his courses as Web Enhanced or "Hybrid." In these courses, students take online quizzes, participate in "live chats," form study groups, and access supplemental course material. In the years to come, the department will become increasingly web savvy and we will certainly make web-based technological competency an important criterion when evaluating the qualifications of Howard DeWitt's potential replacement.

## **2. Relationship to Ohlone College Mission and Goals**

In keeping with the Ohlone College motto, "A World of Cultures United in Learning," its core values, and its goals, our curriculum is designed to impart several history and political science specific benefits upon the students.

The benefits derived from the study of history and political science fall into three categories: civic, intellectual, and moral. Studying history and political science performs a civic function by imparting to students the democratic values of respect for free speech and the free exchange of ideas so important for effective citizenship. Intellectually, students can acquire the content knowledge, and develop the cognitive skills, necessary for success in their academic and professional careers. Finally, studying history and political science can perform a moral function by generating vicarious experiences in which students can test their own beliefs and values by the standards of others across time and space.

History and political science provide unique insight into human nature and human civilization. By demanding that we see the world through the eyes of others, that we develop a sense of context and coherence while recognizing complexity and ambiguity, and that we confront the record not only of human achievement but also of human failure, the study of history and political science provide us with a richly-textured, substantive framework for understanding the human condition.

## **3. Program Student Learning Outcomes**

### **Affective Domain**

- Students will develop an appreciation for the importance of historical and social science scholarship by:

- gaining a comprehension of both continuity and change over time as they position themselves and their country, especially its institutions, within the larger historical narrative.

#### Cognitive Domain

- Students will develop an understanding of the specific strengths, limitations, and biases of historical and social science scholarship by:
  - Describing what historians and political scientists do through a recognition of the kinds of sources they rely on and the types of questions they ask;
  - identifying the difference between primary and secondary sources;
  - critically thinking about course content to formulate their own interpretations.
- Students will develop effective communications skills by:
  - reading secondary and primary source material;
  - discussing course content with the instructor and among their classmates;
  - writing basic essay arguments using historical and social scientific evidence.

#### **4. Assessment of Student Success in Reaching Program Outcomes**

#### **5. Assessment of Program Through Review of the Teaching Learning Process**

To avoid redundancy, sections 4 and 5 are combined below:

History is not merely one subject among many within a college curriculum, but the central organizing discipline of education (every subject has a history), and often, our offerings are a student's first and only college history or political science course. As such, it is an important opportunity to teach both general, and discipline specific, cognitive skills.

#### **Affective Domain**

One of the best ways to determine success with this learning outcome is to survey the students at the beginning and end of the semester (see appendix A and B). Two of the key questions to ask on this document are, "Why should we study the past?" and "How will you benefit from this course?" The faculty in our department will assess this material and devote at least one lecture/discussion in the beginning of the semester to this topic. Part of the final exam should have an essay or short answer question that is cumulative and requires the student to engage the "why study the past" question with specific course content. Finally, the students will fill out an exit survey in which they will again be asked to answer these questions and provide a short example that demonstrates their position.

#### **Cognitive Domain**

Students will develop an understanding of the specific strengths, limitations, and biases of historical and social science scholarship.

In order for students to develop an understanding of the specific strengths, limitations, and biases of historical and social science scholarship, they must be able to situate themselves, the era in which they live, and their country and its institutions within a larger historical narrative. They must also develop an understanding that this narrative is both subjective and objective. Our curriculum, therefore, is designed to reveal several discipline specific biases in particular, the

tendency for culturally grounded suppositions to affect both human behavior as well as historical and social science scholarship. Of course, students must learn dates, events, historical actors, etcetera, but they must also learn to recognize the diversity of values and beliefs that underlie secondary and primary documents. Students have much to gain from an awareness that knowledge (historical, political, or otherwise) is not fixed, but often incomplete or vague, and thus open to varying interpretations. We want them to see that intellectual inquiry is part of an ongoing process in which they, by taking a history or political science course, are now engaged.

To bring students to this critical understanding of the contextuality of knowledge, instructors use primary sources, such as photographs, film, oral histories, letters, diaries, and autobiographies, to which students can easily relate. These documents allow them to learn about historical subjects and political science theories by integrating the information into their own life experience.

**Utilizing The Socratic Method:** To get students to construct and take responsibility for interpretations of their own, instructors will occasionally structure classroom debates and role-play exercises around controversial or contemporary issues. The idea is to get them to engage with the course material on several levels, and to integrate classroom experience with students' prior knowledge. The department wants students to appreciate that teaching and learning is a collaborative, active process. One of our main goals is to provide students with a more hands-on method of exploring intellectual perspectives and to provide a dynamic teaching and learning environment characterized by interactive classroom activities and lively presentations. Lecture is an important and effective teaching method but it has the potential to trigger passivity. To prevent this, our instructors mix discussion sessions and visual learning activities within their lectures. They regularly reinforce key ideas with visual media such as film, maps, hand-outs, Websites, or PowerPoint slides, and they intermittently pause to ask or answer questions. The best way to gauge SLO in this category is to observe how students interact with each other and the instructor during classroom discussion. A significant amount of class time should be dedicated to discussion and the instructor should have several opportunities to model and teach the various Socratic methodologies.

Students will develop effective communications skill:

Studying history and political science contributes to general education by improving students' communication, analysis, and problem solving skills. Assignments are designed to strengthen a student's ability to read critically by identifying the thesis and the supporting evidence of a secondary work, and the underlying assumptions of a primary document. To develop writing skills, instructors assign research papers and/or short answer "response" essays. In these assignments, students must use relevant historical evidence to defend generalizations, employ the organizational elements of formal writing, and compose clear and succinct essays. Finally, lectures and classroom discussions are structured so that students can enhance social interaction, listening, and note-taking skills. To improve these aptitudes, instructors teach various note-taking strategies, and hold students accountable (on quizzes and exams) for material discussed and presented in class. Furthermore, students will be encouraged to show their instructors their notebooks so that progress with this important learning outcome can be gauged on a continual basis. Finally, A student will not pass any course offered in our department if they cannot demonstrate sufficient competency in written communications skills—all final exams have at least one component that requires students to write a detailed essay formatted answer in response to a complex historical/political science question.

### **Continued Increase in Enrollment and Retention**

The department is currently in a transition period. As previously noted, we have hired one new full-time faculty member in 2004 and we will hire another in 2006. Because new personnel tend to bring new ideas to the table, we anticipate a strong revitalization in the departments core curriculum. This trend is already underway with History 117a 117b and we hope Howard DeWitt's replacement will continue this process with other courses throughout the department. One of the greatest areas for expansion is online learning and the new hire should expect to have at least two sections of our core courses up and running by his or her second year. We also anticipate revitalizing the self-paced curriculum as the two new full-time faculty members begin the process of recording their lectures into a self-paced format. The combination of new faculty, increased online course offerings, and revamped self-paced sections should boost enrollment by 20% over the next four years.

### **Conclusion**

All of the teaching strategies are designed to bring students to a critical understanding of history and political science. By the end of the term, students must recognize the difference between fact and interpretation, have a better understanding of what historians and political scientists do (the questions they ask, the documents they use), and express their ideas clearly in writing. To assess competency with these and other cognitive outcomes, instructors are encouraged to develop individual course portfolios or keep weekly journals where among other things, they can record intellectual choices regarding course content and assignments. Peer groups provide another forum where instructors from varied disciplines can discuss their different strategies. All of this helps promote critical introspection about the relationship between educational goals and pedagogical means, something the department takes very seriously.

### **6. Assessment of Program Improvement Since Previous Program Review**

Current course SLOs have been re-written and updated this year. The new policy of program SLOs have been implemented as well. There have been no significant program revisions since the last review in 2001-2002. We will review this data next year and update this section accordingly.

### **7. Describe Review and Dissemination Team Involvement**

Dissemination Team: Darren Bardell (History), Alan Kirshner (Political Science/History), Mikelyn Stacey (Dean— Language Arts, Library, and Social Sciences Division), Jeff Watanabe (Biology), Krissy Ostlund (Ohlone Student). Darren Bardell wrote the first draft of this document during the Spring of 2005 and sent it to Alan Kirshner and Mikelyn Stacey for their feedback. Based on their suggestions and comments, Darren reworked the document and sent it to all the members of the dissemination team. Daren met with the individual members of the team at various times throughout the Fall 2005, term and revised the document in response to their helpful feedback.