Department of History and Political Science SLO Assessments

By Heather McCarty
SLO 2: Students will develop an understanding of the specific strengths, limitations, and biases of historical and social science scholarship by:

(a) 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;
(b) identifying the difference between primary and secondary sources;
What we are doing to achieve this?

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How to measure if it is working?
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- What is historiography?
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• 2008-09 = 92% of students successfully answered the first two survey questions at the end of the semester
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  - We did not quantify the initial survey because so few students correctly answered the question we didn’t want to code the surveys and tally the results.
  - Also did not quantify because of an obvious flaw with our first survey—didn’t track students with identifying information.
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Results:
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    - 9% knew what a primary source was.
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    • 9% knew what a primary source was.
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  • At end of course:
    • 98% knew what a primary document was.
    • 93% knew what a secondary source was.
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  • At beginning of course:
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  • At end of course:
    • 98% knew what a primary document was.
    • 93% knew what a secondary source was.

• These results made me ask, if at the end of the semester they all seem to know it, why are the initial results so low each semester? Don’t we have repeat students? Shouldn’t they know the answers?
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  • At beginning of course 19 former students out of a total 168 sample size from H105 and H119B:
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  • At beginning of course 19 former students out of a total 168 sample size from H105 and H119B:
    • 89% knew what a primary source was.
    • 65% knew what a secondary source was.

• Confirms what I suspected: the long-term retention of the material isn’t where it should be.
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- Still have another 260 surveys expected from Ralph DeUnamuno from the double sections of 117A and 117B.
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SLO 3:
Students will develop effective communications skills by:
  (a) reading secondary and primary source material;
  (b) discussing course content with the instructor and among their classmates;
  (c) writing basic essay arguments using historical and social scientific evidence.
What we are doing to achieve this?

- Each full-time faculty member devotes at least one lecture to the discipline, which includes discussions on change over time; how to construct historical arguments and use evidence; and primary and secondary sources.
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How to measure if it is working?
SLO 1 & 3 Assessment:
Previously:

• Each full-time faculty member includes on their final exam a “change over time” essay question specific to course content.
• In order to pass this question, students must make a historical argument regarding change over time supported by evidence drawn from primary and secondary materials from the course.
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- We used student completion rates in the course as a measure.
  - But that doesn’t actually confirm if students successfully answered the specific change over time question.
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Starting Spring 2012:

• Track how many students in our three major survey courses – History 117A, 117B, and 105 – taught by full time faculty passed the change over time question on the final exam.
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  • These are our highest enrolled courses.
  • Allows the department to monitor students at least once as they complete their required courses for the Ohlone transfer plans to CSU and UC.