

# Annual Assessment Report

**Department: History**

**Academic Year: 2020-21**

**Date of Submission: September 20, 2021**

**Department Chair: Heather Keaney**

According to our 6-year program review, during the 2020-21 AY the history department had planned to assess Construction of Arguments (Critical Thinking). However, like everyone we began the AY in the throes of Covid. In addition, our top priority as a department was conducting a national search for a new historian of US history. All department meetings in the fall semester were taken up with this concern. The first part of the Spring semester was taken up with trying to pull off a campus visit for our top candidate in the midst of constantly changing Covid restrictions.

To be honest the thought of assessing some aspect of student learning did not cross my mind until Spring Break when I went for a walk with a member of the PRC and the topic came up.

As a result, we are pushing back by a year our proposed assessment schedule. We will assess Construction of Arguments (Critical Thinking) during the 2021-22 AY.

For our 2019-2023 Review cycle we identified these Key Questions:

1. How can we prepare students to work more effectively with primary sources prior to their enrollment in HIS 198 (Senior Research Seminar)?
2. Through what means can we strengthen our students' capacities to construct evidence-based arguments (interpretations)?
3. In what ways can we enhance our students' understanding of and sensibilities about matters of race and racism both within history and in the contemporary world?

This is what we have been doing to address these this past year. In addition to the remarks below by individual faculty, we worked as a department with the GE committee to amend the Certification Criteria of HIS 010 (Perspectives on World History) to include the following in support of the new JRD GE.

understand how historical trajectories shape contemporary issues relating to race, ethnicity, migration, and justice in the United States and globally

Alister Chapman:

In HIS144 Revolutionary Europe, I added a research project that requires students to start with primary sources and develop their research questions and preliminary answers from those before significant engagement with secondary sources. This forces them to engage primary sources more and to make arguments that arise from them. I frame this as a mini-198 assignment. It worked as a bridge between the work they have done in Foundations on History and that which they will be required to do in the senior seminar.

In HIS144, I included a new book (Hall and Rose, eds., *At Home With Empire*) on how the British empire affected society back home, as a way of incorporating race more fully into our exploration of European history. I also included more instruction on slavery in our treatment of British economic growth in the eighteenth century.

In HIS10, I have developed my syllabus language about diversity to include more of an emphasis on the justice issues that such historical discussions often raise. Race continues to be a significant theme in the course, and I have had significant feedback that this has helped student develop their thinking on the issue.

Heather Keaney:

In HIS 010 I created a new assignment on “global challenges. I divided the class into three groups and three topics: poverty, sustainability, and racism. For each topic the student group read a book, carried on weekly discussion board conversations about the book and shared on the book periodically with the whole class. The student group addressing racism read Jemar Tisby’s *The Color of Compromise*. The concept of race that developed out of the Enlightenment, the rise of chattel slavery in the Americas, and the use of race in comparison with other ways societies have divided up people and allocated resources is a theme we revisit throughout the course.

In HIS 010 I also introduced a three-week role play game set in 1920s Egypt. In this activity students take on the identity of different historical characters and read a packet of primary sources. From these they must craft persuasive arguments which they submit as essays to me and deliver as speeches to the class. They must persuade other students to join them in order to achieve objectives included in their role sheet.

Marianne Robins:

1. How can we prepare students to work more effectively with primary sources prior to their enrollment in HIS 198 (Senior Research Seminar)?

In the Fall of 2020, the History 121 class worked very explicitly on reading primary sources. Although this has always been an emphasis of the class, I revised the documents concerning the analysis of primary sources to have a more visual rendering of the same guidelines, and assigned a new micro history entitled “A Poisoned Past” that speaks very explicitly about the nature of primary sources available on the case and develops the possible uses historians can make of those sources depending of their area of specialty (social historian versus legal historian for instance). The book’s focus on the material aspects of the sources (forms of writing, number of sources, conservation, etc.) helps students capture the many steps historians take to gain a clear and coherent understanding of primary sources. Students commented verbally on how helpful this source has been for their approach of primary sources. This semester, I am planning on highlighting this book even more and having part of the final exam include a reflection on the ways in which this reading shaped students’ ability to think historically.

3. In what ways can we enhance our students’ understanding of and sensibilities about matters of race and racism both within history and in the contemporary world?

In History 134, “Reformation Spirituality in Early-Modern Europe”, I developed a new unit entitled “missions and race” that used two case studies, one based on the movie “Black Robe” set in contemporary Canada, the other based on readings from “Black Saints” in Latin America. Many students in the class were fairly knowledgeable about race, but were surprised to hear how race in Latin America intersected with class in a European setting. While there was no formal assessment report of the learning in the class (assessment happened through notes and discussions), students spoke more explicitly about the ways in which race functioned both similarly and differently in South America than it does in the contemporary United States. Overall they understood that black confraternities were not merely (or even at all) preservers of African culture but also instruments of powers for Afro-Iberians to improve their status. The main challenge for this particular unit was the discrepancy between the prior exposure to and understanding of race as a category of analysis between different students in the class (history and humanities majors as opposed to business and kinesiology majors). Next semester, I plan on making a more explicit introduction to the concept before students do the assignments.

Chandra Mallampalli is in Boston. Our US history courses were taught by an adjunct during the 2020-21 AY.