

Annual Report for Assessment of Outcomes
History, 2011-2012
Critical Thinking, Community and Social Responsibility

1. **Describe changes that have been implemented towards improving students' attainment of outcomes that resulted from outcome assessments carried out in the previous academic year.**

During the 2010-2011 academic year, the history SAC assessed the Communication and Cultural Awareness outcomes and, based on the results of our assessment, we effected a series of changes to the way we teach our classes. We re-assessed those two outcomes during the current academic year to evaluate the efficacy of the changes we implemented.

Communication

The SAC assessed Communication for the 2010-2011 using the following rubric:

Communication Rubric

"Communicate effectively using historical analysis."

	Strong (3 points)	Emerging (2 points)	Weak (1 point)
Focus on the Assignment	Essay clearly and consistently focuses on the assigned question, and includes a strong thesis statement.	Essay generally but inconsistently addresses the question posed, and features a thesis statement that is not entirely relevant to the question.	Essay does not focus on the question posed, and either lacks a thesis statement or has a thesis statement that is not pertinent to the assignment.
Use of Supporting Materials	Provides abundant and relevant supporting evidence that effectively sustains the essay's argument.	Makes use of some supporting evidence, but does so inconsistently.	Makes use of little or no supporting evidence.
Syntax and Organization	Essay is gracefully and straightforwardly written with few or no grammatical errors and has a clear and effective organizational scheme; prose effectively and clearly conveys meaning to the reader.	Essay is generally well written and organized, but has some grammatical, organizational, and stylistic errors that may impede the reader's ability to grasp the writer's points.	Essay lacks an effective system of organization and has many grammatical and stylistic errors that obscure the arguments the author's ideas.

The SAC was pleased overall with the results of last year's assessment of Communication, but also saw room for improvement with regard to Syntax and Organization. The History faculty consequently agreed to pursue a variety of approaches aimed at helping students make their writing more graceful and grammatically correct. For example, one instructor developed an online writing guide designed to help students both better organize their essays and avoid the basic grammatical errors (its, it's, etc.) common to first-year students (see Appendix 1). Another instructor began requiring students who turned in sub-par work to resubmit their essays after first visiting the Student Success center, while a third instructor worked to improve grammar by beginning each class with a student-centered discussion of a common writing error.

As part of this year's assessment process, the SAC used the 2010-2011 Communication rubric to evaluate twenty-four essays from HST 202 in order to see whether our assessment-driven efforts have borne fruit. Based on the results in the following table—which compares the average of last year's papers with the average of the current year's artifacts—the SAC is pleased with the results of the changes we have implemented:

Communication Results		
	2010-2011	2011-2012
Focus	2.03	2.08
Supporting Materials	1.87	1.96
Syntax and Organization	1.61	1.94

While "Focus" and "Support" saw only statistically insignificant change, the student performance on "Syntax"—the focus of the history SAC's efforts to enhance student learning—experienced noticeable and significant improvement.

Cultural Awareness

The SAC assessed for the Cultural Awareness outcome during the 2010-2011 academic year using the following rubric:

Cultural Awareness Rubric

"Identify the influence of culturally-based practices, values, and beliefs to assess how historically defined meanings of difference affect human behavior."

	Strong (3 points)	Emerging (2 points)	Weak (1 point)
Cultural Awareness	Demonstrates a strong awareness of how culturally-based assumptions influence perceptions, behaviors, and policies.	Demonstrates some awareness of how culturally-based assumptions influence perceptions, behaviors, and	Demonstrates little awareness of how culturally-based assumptions influence perceptions, behaviors,

		policies.	and policies.
Historical Bases of Cultural Ideas	Exhibits a clear grasp of the historical bases and evolution of diverse cultural ideas, behaviors, and issues.	Exhibits some understanding of the historical bases and evolution of diverse cultural ideas, behaviors, and issues.	Exhibits little understanding of the historical bases and evolution of diverse cultural ideas, behaviors, and issues.
Hierarchy	Shows a strong understanding of the ways in which social institutions perpetuate systems of privilege and discrimination.	Shows some understanding of the ways in which social institutions perpetuate systems of privilege and discrimination.	Shows little understanding of the ways in which social institutions perpetuate systems of privilege and discrimination.

The history SAC was generally pleased with the results of last year's assessment of Cultural Awareness, though we felt that a mismatch between the rubric and several of the assignments evaluated may have affected the results—a consequence of the fact that every assignment need not match up with all six of PCC's Core Outcomes. Beginning this academic year, the SAC consequently agreed to better match the artifacts to the outcome for which the SAC is assessing. In other words, if the SAC is assessing for Cultural Awareness, we would ensure that the artifacts we select focus explicitly on having students demonstrate their capacity for cultural awareness.

As we are assessing for Critical Thinking and for Environmental and Community Responsibility this academic year, the SAC consequently went to great lengths to evaluate artifacts pertinent to those outcomes. The SAC felt that the assessment process was, as a consequence, much more relevant and valuable to us this year. Though some of the artifacts we evaluated did touch upon the Cultural Awareness outcome, however, most did not; as a result, the SAC again found itself reviewing a selection of student work that did not explicitly ask students to demonstrate their capacity for cultural awareness.

Not surprisingly, as the following table makes clear, our evaluation of twenty-six artifacts from HST 102 using the 2010-2011 Cultural Awareness showed no statistically significant change from last academic year's assessment. Despite the need to further tweak the process of evaluation, however, we remain quite pleased with the performance of our students on the Cultural Awareness Outcome. Rendered as an average, our students' Cultural Awareness scores for both the current and prior academic year seem appropriate—indeed, strong—for first- and second-year students.

Cultural Awareness Results

	2010-2011	2011-2012
Cultural Awareness	2.35	2.24

Historical Bases	2.32	2.31
Hierarchy	2.12	2.11

2. **Identify the outcomes assessed this year, and describe the methods used. What were the results of the assessment (i.e., what did you learn about how well students are meeting the outcomes)?**

Introduction

Based on the Peer Review of our 2010-2011 Assessment Report and on vigorous discussions within the history SAC, we decided to alter substantially the way we conduct learning assessment for the year 2011-2012. The Peer Review of the history SAC's assessment of student learning was very positive, but it also criticized us for using rubrics that were too generic and that failed to assess subject-specific outcomes. In particular, our reviewers pointed out that "the rubric used to assess communication, and the report on results, does not indicate any history-specific communication items," and they called on the history SAC to include discipline-specific skills during future assessments. This critique aligned nicely with the feelings of many SAC members. While we felt that we competently handled last academic year's assessment process, the SAC also determined that our assessment of outcomes was too general, and, owing to its focus on PCC's institutional outcomes, failed to address discipline-specific outcomes.

After significant discussion and reflection, the history faculty concluded that the SAC could address these concerns by aligning history outcomes (derived from the intended outcomes on history CCOGs) with PCC's Institutional Outcomes. Specifically, we decided to map each history intended-learning outcome to the PCC Core Outcome to which it most closely fit. This approach will serve several ends. First and most obviously, it will satisfy the Peer Review's call for us to focus more on discipline-specific outcomes. Second, it will help us to make a stronger case that the skills and knowledge that students acquire through the study of history help undergraduates to achieve the PCC Core Outcomes. Finally, and most importantly, this approach will provide the history SAC with better feedback that we can use to improve our courses and teaching.

Outcomes Assessed and Method

Given this significant change in approach, the history SAC has decided that for 2011-2012 we would assess one new outcome, Community and Environmental Responsibility, and one outcome that we have already assessed, Critical Thinking.

- **Critical Thinking and Problem Solving**

Translating the PCC Critical Thinking and Problem Solving Core Outcome into discipline-specific terms was fairly straightforward. Students who meet the history Critically Thinking intended learning outcome of "us[ing] critical thinking in order to

evaluate historical changes and their impact” through the study of primary and secondary sources, axiomatically meet the PCC Critical Thinking Core Outcome’s call that they be able to “[e]valuate information and its sources critically,” “[f]ormulate and articulate ideas,” “[i]dentify, evaluate and synthesize information,” and “[r]eason toward a conclusion or application.”

Having mapped the PCC Core Outcome of Critical Thinking to the history Critical Thinking course outcome, the History SAC was then able to develop the following discipline-specific rubric to serve as the basis of our assessment of student work:

HST 102 Critical Thinking and Problem Solving Rubric

	Strong (3)	Emerging (2)	Weak (1)
Summary of primary and/or secondary sources	Clearly identifies and summarizes the key ideas and concepts in the source material	Generally but inconsistently identifies and summarizes the main ideas and concepts in the source material	Fails to identify or to summarize effectively the sources
Analysis of primary and/or secondary sources	Clearly analyzes the sources using historical methods of analysis, and demonstrates their significance	Generally but inconsistently analyzes the sources using historical methods of analysis, and demonstrates some of their significance	Fails to analyze the sources or to demonstrate their significance
Ability to develop an interpretation using evidence to support it	Develops a comprehensive interpretation of the evidence and successfully supports it	Provides some analysis of the evidence but lacks a coherent interpretation	Fails to develop an interpretation of the evidence

We decided to use this new, discipline-specific Critical Thinking rubric to evaluate artifacts from HST 102, Western Civilization from 1000-1800. HST 102 is a popular class taught at every PCC campus, so this choice ensured that we would be evaluating a broad sample of student work. We consequently collected twenty-seven artifacts from six sections of HST 102 taught at Sylvania, Cascade, Rock Creek, and the Southeast Center. At our SAC meeting on April 24, 2012, the History faculty collectively used the Critical Thinking rubric to norm one essay. Ten full- and part-time instructors then broke into pairs and divided the remaining twenty-six artifacts among them to ensure that each item was read and rated by two people using the new rubric.

- **Community and Environmental Responsibility**

Translating the PCC Community and Environmental Responsibility Core Outcome into discipline-specific terms was somewhat more complicated owing to the broad nature of that outcome. After a great deal of thought, the history SAC concluded that the PCC Community and Environmental Responsibility Core Outcome related well to the history course outcome of Connecting Past to Present. Students who meet the History intended learning outcome of “[c]onnect[ing] the past with present-day events to enhance contemporary understanding and encourage civic activities” simultaneously meet the PCC Community and Environmental Responsibility Core Outcome’s demand that they be able to “[a]nalyze community and global issues and develop strategies for informed response,” “respond to community issues and contribute to the community,” “[i]dentify how culture affects people’s responses to and sense of responsibility toward the community and the environment, including the creation and dissemination of images and ideas through various media.”

Having mapped the history core outcome of Connecting Past to Present to the PCC Community and Environmental Responsibility Core Outcome, the history SAC then developed the following, new, discipline-specific rubric to serve as the basis of our assessment of student work:

HST 202 Connecting Past to Present (Community and Environmental Responsibility)

	Strong (3)	Emerging (2)	Weak (1)
Ability to recognize historical patterns	Student demonstrates an advanced understanding of specific historical patterns and how the past relates to the present.	Student demonstrates an emerging awareness that specific historical patterns exist, and that the past relates to the present.	Student fails to demonstrate any awareness that historical patterns exist, and that the past relates to the present.
Ability to think critically about the relationships between past and present events and issues	Student demonstrates an excellent comprehension of the connections between the past, present, and future.	Student exhibits a basic awareness of the connections between past and present but lacks critical analysis	Student fails to develop an understanding of how past events and issues affect the present

Since we were already using artifacts drawn from a Western Civilization course for our assessment of Critical Thinking, we decided to use the new Connecting Past to Present rubric to assess artifacts from HST 202, US History from 1840-1914. This choice ensured that we were evaluating a broad sample of student work, and also that we were assessing student submissions from both of our core survey sequences. We consequently collected twenty-five artifacts from four sections of HST 202 taught at Sylvania, Cascade, and Rock Creek. At our SAC meeting on April 24, 2012, the history SAC first used the Connecting Past to Present rubric to norm one essay. Eight full- and part-time faculty members then divided the remaining

twenty-four artifacts among them to ensure that each item was read and rated by two instructors using the new rubric.

What We Learned

- **Critical Thinking**

The average scores for the twenty-six HST 102 artifacts we evaluated for Critical Thinking were as follows:

Critical Thinking, 2011-2012

Summary of Sources	2.63
Analysis of Sources	2.46
Ability to Interpret	2.35

The SAC was very pleased with our students' ability to think critically, though unsurprised given the centrality of these skills to the study of history and our concomitant emphasis on fostering these abilities in our students. Most obviously, our students demonstrated an outstanding capacity to summarize and analyze primary and secondary sources—skills that are essential for success when they take upper-division courses after they transfer to four-year institutions. Counterintuitively, we were most pleased with the ability of our students to develop their own interpretations of primary and secondary sources despite the fact that they scored lowest in that category. Interpretation is a higher-order skill, and we fully expected students to score significantly lower in that category than in the others; we were thus ecstatic to see our students scoring between Emerging and Strong in that category.

- **Connecting Past to Present (Community and Environmental Responsibility)**

The average scores for the twenty-four HST 202 artifacts we evaluated for Connecting Past to Present were as follows:

Connecting Past to Present, 2011-2012

Ability to Recognize Historical Patterns	2.00
Ability to Grasp Relationships Between Past and Present	2.04

We were pleased with our students' ability to understand the relationship between present day institutions, practices, and events and the past. Given the complexity and subtlety that such thinking requires, we did not expect our students to score very high on this outcome. After all, even well-educated and powerful people often badly misuse the lessons of history. For example, pundits frequently analogize even the most modest proposal for a diplomatic approach toward hostile countries to the policy of Appeasement pursued by Britain and France toward Germany in the late 1930s—no matter how forced or inapplicable such an analogy may be. Given the propensity for well-educated, elite opinion makers to fail so demonstrably to grasp

the subtleties of the relationship between present-day events and the past, we were quite pleased that our students were squarely at the Emerging level in understanding the connection of past to present.

3. Identify any changes that should, as a result of this assessment, be implemented towards improving students' attainment of outcomes.

- **Critical Thinking**

Though the SAC is very happy with our students' ability to think critically, we are also keen to improve their performance in this essential aspect of academic and personal success. History instructors consequently agreed to work to improve critical thinking skills—and thereby enhance our students' ability to succeed after they transfer to four-year institutions—by revising teaching methods and assignments. While impressed with our students' ability to summarize and analyze sources on out-of-class assignments, for example, one instructor noted that his students remained weak at summarizing and synthesizing source material on in-class, closed-book, essay exams. He is consequently planning to add a new, open-book assignment to his Western Civilization courses that constitutes a dry run for the midterm and final exams. He hopes that this assignment will improve student performance on those tests, and, more broadly, that it will help them develop the summarizing and synthesizing skills that they will need to perform well on exams after they transfer to four-year institutions. Another instructor would like to see his students develop their capacity to summarize, analyze, and interpret historical monographs. He is consequently developing an assignment that asks students to write a thesis-driven interpretive essay based on a historical monograph.

- **Connecting Past to Present**

Though the SAC is also pleased with our students' ability to connect the past to the present, we also saw room for improvement in this critical, higher-order skill. SAC members consequently agreed to modify existing assignments and teaching methods or to develop new ones to achieve this end. For example, one instructor has agreed to add questions to online discussions aimed at encouraging students to think about how past and present interact. Another instructor, meanwhile, is in the process of developing a new assignment that asks students to compare and contrast *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and the "Declaration of the Occupy Wall Street Movement" (2011) with an eye toward demonstrating points of continuity and discontinuity between social movements of today and those of the mid nineteenth century.

Appendix 1

Writing an Essay at the College Level

This handout will help you write more effective college-level essays. It includes a guide to help you organize, draft, and revise your paper; content and style points that will improve your argument and the quality of your prose; and a list of do's and don'ts. Please read this sheet over before you write each paper, after you have completed your first draft, and before you make changes to your final draft.

Remember, writing is not a free-form activity. It is a three-step process in which you first organize and outline your thoughts, then develop a rough draft, and, finally, undertake a series of revisions aimed at sharpening your argument and improving your prose. By approaching a writing assignment with such a plan, you will compose clearer, more logical, and more persuasive papers. You will also receive better grades for your effort.

Organizing and Outlining

- First things first. Read and thoroughly understand the question. If you are confused, talk to your professor or teaching assistant.
- With an eye towards the assignment, review the reading material and any notes you have taken. Think of the position that you plan to take, and jot down any examples or quotes that you plan to use.
- Brainstorm.
- Develop an argumentative working thesis statement that answers the assigned question.
- Think about how you want to introduce and conclude the essay. Your introduction should link the specific question at hand and your thesis to a larger issue (preferably an issue about which you have strong feelings; writing about a topic that connects in some way to things that interest you is both easier and more fun). Take a look at the "Introduction" entry under the "Content and Style Points" section listed below for further advice about how to construct an effective intro.
- Develop an outline. Generally, hundred-level essays call for a simple outline that includes an introduction, a conclusion, and three main body points that tie into and advance your thesis. An outline will guide your writing, keep you from straying from your thesis, and help assure that your essay is argumentative rather than a descriptive list (description is NOT the name of the game in college-level writing; analysis is).

Drafting Your Paper

- Draft your essay. You are not trying to write a flawless draft the first time, so do not worry about making it perfect.
- Make sure that you use concrete examples from the readings—either paraphrased or quoted—and that you ANALYZE THEM.

Revising Your Essay and Preparing it for Submission

- Nothing improves the quality of written work like multiple drafts. Even a single extra draft will result in a sharper argument, clearer prose, better organization, and, most important, higher grades.
- Revise drafts on printed copies rather than the computer screen. You will more easily see errors and be able to compare points made on different pages when working with paper.
- Start with big revisions. Make sure that you answer the question asked (if not, do not despair. A few revised drafts should do the trick).
- Next, make sure that the organization is effective. If not, reorder or delete paragraphs as necessary and develop new ideas to fill holes in your argument.
- Then assure that your paper is argumentative (remember: description does not cut it at the college level). If a paragraph is unnecessarily descriptive, revise it to make it more focused and pointed (usually you can do this most effectively by revising the topic sentence).
- Lastly, work on fixing any grammatical errors and on making the prose clearer and more graceful. One effective—if goofy sounding—way to do this is to read your draft aloud. You will be surprised to discover that you can often hear style and grammar problems better than you can see them.
- Repeat the prior step two or three more times. You do want to get a good grade don't you?
- Have a friend read it over. Asking is something of an imposition, but having someone else review your draft—preferably someone completely unfamiliar with the assignment—will greatly help your paper. Why? Because they are unfamiliar with the topic and readings, and will thus assure that you are writing for a sufficiently broad audience.
- Turn your paper in on time. See receiving a good grade comment above.

Content and Style Points

Introduction

- Introductions are the most difficult part of an essay to write. They thus merit extra attention. An introduction must include a thesis statement (usually the last sentence of the introductory paragraph) and should link the paper to some larger issue. One especially effective technique is to begin your introduction with a general point that leads to the more specific point embodied in your thesis. For an assignment that asks you to determine if a character in a novel is a hero, for instance, you could begin by providing a definition of a hero (a general point) and then move on to your thesis (your take on why the character is or is not a hero—the specific point). An introduction should also serve as a road map or blueprint for your paper. It should set out what main points, issues, or concepts you are going to address. For the hero paper discussed above, for example, you might want to say in your thesis statement that the character was a hero because he was brave, loyal, and willing to make sacrifices to achieve his goal. The body, in this case, would include paragraphs on the character's bravery, loyalty, and self sacrifice.

- One final point: you might want to write your introduction last. Your argument will often develop as you compose the first draft. By developing the introduction after you have drafted the paper you will assure that the intro and the body of the paper match up and will avoid having to rewrite completely the introduction.

Conclusion

- Try to end on a broad point. Should you devise an introduction that moves from the general to the specific, your conclusion will do precisely the opposite: it will move from the specific to the general and will, if effectively put together, raise larger issues.

Thesis Statement

- Think of the thesis statement as the point of your paper. It is a contestable point rather than a statement of fact and, for short papers, is usually the last sentence of your introduction.

Topic Sentences

- Make sure that each paragraph has an effective topic sentence. A good topic sentence introduces the new paragraph and summarizes its main point; links it to your thesis; and transitions from the prior paragraph.

Evidence and Analysis

- Make sure that your body paragraphs make use of sufficient evidence in the form of either paraphrased or quoted material. Quotes from the source material are especially effective, but do not use too many of them else your paper will read like a list of quotations. Be certain to analyze your evidence sufficiently. You want to explain through your analysis how the examples you use support your thesis. Think of this as show-and-tell. The examples are the 'show'; the analysis is the 'tell.'

Paragraphs

- Effective paragraphs focus on one main idea. Every sentence in the paragraph should relate to the main point of the paragraph (which should be laid out in the topic sentence). If a sentence does not fit into the main point, you should remove or rework it.

Passive Voice

- Work on writing in the active rather than the passive voice. Writing in the active voice ("Whites oppressed blacks after Reconstruction") rather than the passive voice ("Blacks were oppressed after Reconstruction") is easier to read and more effective because the subject of the sentence is made clear (oppression did not just happen; white people made it happen).

Context and Audience

- Provide sufficient background and context about the individuals and events you discuss. Assume that your audience is unfamiliar with the readings on which you have based your paper.

Miscellaneous

- To make a singular noun that ends in 's' possessive add apostrophe s. The possessive of Dickens is thus Dickens's. For plural nouns that end in 's' you just add the apostrophe. The possessive of United States is thus United States'.
- "It's" means "it is." "Its" means the possessive of "it" (as in "Its tail" for "The dog's tail").
- Avoid constructions that use 'not' ("unnatural" is better than "not natural").
- In general, avoid using the word 'negative.' This word is clunky and will make your paper sound like a professional wrestler wrote it.
- You should use parenthetical cites for short history papers. Just put the authors name and the page number in parentheses after any quotes; you do not need to worry about citing paraphrases.
- Block quotes (big quotes that are longer than three lines) should be single spaced and indented 1/2 inch on both side. They should have a single blank line above and below them.
- Double space your paper and use a twelve-point font.
- If you need to expand a short paper use Courier. Though inelegant, it fills a lot of space without being absurdly large.
- Do not use contractions in academic writing.
- Do not use the first person in academic writing.
- Do not use colloquialisms or slang in academic writing.
- Do not begin sentences with conjunctions such as 'and' or 'but.'