Criteria for Program Assessment

History Courses

Specific courses being assessed:  HIST-A306, HIST-A394, HIST-W194

1. Does the syllabus demonstrate satisfactory focus on learning objectives (see Assessment Matrix)?

A1 A306 addresses this objective. A394 and W194 both satisfy the chronological span of objective A1; A394 focuses primarily on institutions with some attention to personalities while W194 pays especial attention to a particular subset of personalities, viz. women.

A2 A306 addresses this objective. A394 emphasizes contexts for studying a particular institution, viz. the Church, while W194 various contexts for discussing significant individuals.

A3 A306 and A394 address this objective explicitly; A194 less clearly addresses the interconnections between sacred and secular issues, but there are ample opportunities in the readings given.

A4 A306, A394, and W194 all place significant emphasis on primary source documents. A306 in particular offers explicit training in developing the skill set described in this objective. A394 and W194 address this area less obviously, but even here there is clearly some study of primary sources (historical and/or literary), and opportunity for further contact in secondary readings and written work.

E1 A306, A394, and W194 all require significant writing on medieval subjects.

E2 A306, A394, and W194 all require active participation in small- and/or large-group discussion in order to pass the course. Only W194 requires an additional in-class, ten-minute oral presentation on a medieval figure. All, however, put a great deal of emphasis on participation, which is fostered in both small-group and large-group settings, and this gives students the opportunity to improve in less formal oral communication. In this case, perhaps it is the learning objective rather than the courses that should be modified, toward an emphasis on oral communication rather than oral presentation.

2. What is the weakest aspect of the History courses? How should this be addressed?

The greatest weakness of the present offerings is the relative lack of attention given to the Early Middle Ages. A306 dwells on the period before ca. 1000 for no more than five weeks, two of which are given over to the Roman and Byzantine worlds. There is some scattered attention to the Early Middle Ages in A394 and W194 as well, but the emphasis generally falls on the later centuries. This bias is not at all surprising, and we shall encounter the same problems when we evaluate the English department’s course offerings. The obvious solution is to encourage the hiring of an early medievalist in the History department or perhaps better yet a Byzantinist in either Classical Studies or History. Otherwise a course devoted to the early period may be in order.
Each course could be improved in different ways. For HIST A306, a wider geographical focus would be useful for students (perhaps a focus on medieval Spain would be useful). For HIST W194, it would be nice to challenge the students with a broader range of primary sources. Perhaps a selection of criminal cases or court documents from P.J.P. Goldberg’s *Women in Medieval England* would be useful to help students see women in an active role in the period. For HIST A394, the reading logs should form a more substantial part of the students’ grade and be described as a more challenging way in the syllabus. Some students in this class constantly shirked the assignment – a stiffer approach to the reading logs would help to make sure that students always do their reading logs and have taken the time to think critically about them before coming to class.

The courses other than the survey only have one (final) exam, plus written work and class participation. This means that students may not know where they stand for much of the semester, and perhaps too much of the final grade must be completed fairly late in the semester. Perhaps adding a midterm exam, as the survey has, could better balance and spread out the work load.

The history courses have a certain Eurocentric focus. While this in itself is not necessarily bad, it would be desirable to give more attention to the cultures and social institutions of medieval Islam and Judaism. It would be good to develop new courses devoted to such topics, and perhaps ideally, to hire a second medieval historian to complement Dr. Butler’s areas of specialty.

3. What is the strongest aspect of the History courses? Why?

These courses, current and soon-to-be, emphasize social history (rather than, say, political or institutional history). The course on the Church uses a textbook on so-called “popular” religion. In terms of recruiting students to medieval history courses, and medieval studies courses in general, an emphasis on social history seems to me to be most appealing. To be clear, these course offerings do not neglect political, institutional, or economic history; rather students seem to be getting various perspectives on the Middle Ages.

Without a doubt, the strongest aspect in all of these courses is the participation requirement. All three classes include an element of class participation, although it is a much larger component of HIST A394 and W194 than of A306. In this setting, students have the opportunity to learn from together and from each other. Moreover, in the two specialized classes in particular, a broad range of readings, some presenting quite controversial topics, is helpful in generating discussion and encouraging students to form their own links between the material.

All courses require substantial written work of a sort that allows students to delve more deeply into areas of special interest.

The history courses provide students with an intensive exposure to the key figures and social institutions that constitute medieval culture. Students are initiated into the work of a medieval historian through a very “hands on” approach; they are provided with opportunities to examine primary source documents and to examine critically and reflectively secondary sources. These
courses help to give our students an intellectual training that is central to the Jesuit Catholic mission of Loyola.

4. Are additional learning objectives being met in the History courses?

All three of the courses under review require students to develop a familiarity with important research tools for doing medieval history, e.g., *The Dictionary of the Middle Ages* or the *IMB*. Although this is not specified as an expected learning outcome on our current matrix, it certainly could be. By requiring students to familiarize themselves with the tools of medieval history (specifically *The Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, *Iter*, the *International Medieval Bibliography*) students are learning the craft of a medieval historian.

5. Additional comments or concerns?
These appear to be interesting, demanding courses which I’d enjoy taking if I could!