

Guidelines for HIST Courses

In March 2017 the history faculty voted to adopt the following classroom practices, distinguished by course level, to better ensure that the history curriculum as a whole meets the goals we've (already) established for our students and majors.

MAJOR OUTCOMES

The department articulates the goals of undergraduate teaching in its tenure guidelines, on its website, and through the surveys we distribute to rising juniors and graduating seniors (where we ask students to evaluate their own abilities in each category). They derive in part from the recommendations of the [Core Document](#) of the AHA's Tuning Project.

A senior history major should be able to

1. understand that human experiences, values, and conceptions of the world change, and make sense of unfamiliar situations and perspectives in order to explain how and why other people lived and thought.
2. understand that even a single society at a single moment in time is diverse in significant ways, and to ask how factors like race, gender, class, religion, geography, age, and other variables have made a difference in what people have experienced and how they have responded to those experiences.
3. make sense of difficult and unfamiliar material (primary sources), by asking what perspectives are highlighted or marginalized, pinpointing implicit understandings that the evidence reveals unintentionally, and acknowledging what uncertainties remain.
4. formulate a working question about a subject, locate primary sources, and find reliable and helpful scholarship (i.e., conduct research).
5. write historically, by processing substantial quantities of information into a coherent set of ideas, building a convincing and clear argument, and documenting and defending the evidence.
6. think historically in a discussion with other people, by listening to others, asking questions that hadn't occurred to them before, and figuring ways to work out an answer based on persuasive interpretations of the evidence at hand.

2000-LEVEL COURSES

Every introductory HIST course should include the goals of (1) understanding the differences between primary and secondary sources, and (2) understanding how historians use them.

3000-LEVEL COURSES

Every 3000-level class should include at least two of the following components:

- Students analyze a primary source (explain its major features and concerns, figure out what perspectives are highlighted or marginalized, pinpoint implicit understandings that the evidence reveals unintentionally, and acknowledge what uncertainties remain).

- Students formulate a question about the past and locate primary and secondary sources that can actually help answer it.
- Students show how an event or historical situation is “more complicated” than it seems to be at first glance (in terms of diverse experiences, multiple lines of causation, etc.).
- Students learn how to read a historical monograph or substantial scholarly article, identify its research question and argument, understand how it uses historical evidence, explain how its answer is new, and suggest how our view of history changes as a result of its findings.

4000-LEVEL COURSES

N.b. *Our degree requirements are that majors need to take at least one 4000-level course before they graduate (but otherwise there is no distinction between 3000- and 4000-level courses as far as degree requirements are concerned).*

All 4000-level courses should include some kind of research component that requires (at the minimum) students to locate and analyze primary and/or secondary sources based on a question or topic they generate themselves, and to cite their evidence and credit their sources appropriately.

This doesn’t mean that everyone has to assign a twenty-page research paper. Five-page papers could work just as well. Other possible assignments or projects could be the following (many of which are suggestions of the Tuning Project and of the AHA *Perspectives* column “The Art of History”):

- Find a long footnote in a scholarly article or monograph and write a paper about it, checking every primary and secondary reference. How do the sources support the point made? How are the cited passages taken in or out of context? Is the secondary material germane to the issue? Etc.
- Contextualize a source by demonstrating in written or oral presentation what historical detail the source needs to be understood.
- Explain in written or oral presentation the different perspectives (such as author, audience, and agenda) between two or more primary sources.
- Present and analyze different perspectives on a single event or situation from the past.
- Find two or more primary sources and demonstrate how they could be synthesized to better understand some aspect of the past.
- Create an annotated bibliography and/or prospectus as a “road map” for answering a historical question, without writing a paper itself.
- Identify and explain a question whose answer historians are still debating.
- Compare how a historical topic is presented on Wikipedia with how it’s presented in current scholarly research.

HIST 4060H/4070H/4080H (CURO research courses)

Any history faculty member is welcome to accept or decline an honors student’s request for an independent research project. All history honors students writing a senior honors thesis (HIST 4990H) are also required to take an additional semester of independent study with the same advisor (HIST 4080H). But occasionally students will also take more than one semester of independent research before 4990H — hence the multiple course designations.

All students in 4080H are required to develop, in consultation with their advisor:

- a directed-reading list (should be determined *in advance of the course*)

- a prospectus
- a preliminary annotated bibliography
- a research and writing schedule for 4990H

At their discretion, advisors may also require advisees enrolled in HIST 4990H — i.e., the thesis-writing semester — to audit a regular 4990, with the permission of the 4990 instructor. But it is never a formal requirement of HIST 4990H.

4990 SEMINARS

In this capstone course to the major students research and write an original and substantial thesis under faculty mentorship.

The goals of 4990s are the following:

1. Students receive a pedagogy that intensively addresses research skills, in addition to the historical and analytical material that is specific to each section.
2. Students learn how to formulate a research question, and to revise it as research progresses.
3. Students learn how to locate and assess the relevance of primary sources.
4. Students learn how to find scholarship that is reliable and useful.
5. Students learn to interpret primary sources.
6. Students learn to build and write convincing and clear argument based on the evidence.
7. Students learn to present and discuss their work with a group.
8. Students learn to offer useful appraisals of their peers' work.

Each HIST 4990 is required to meet **at least ten full weeks** in the semester in order to adequately meet these expectations. Instructors who plan to teach a 4990 have to submit a syllabus as part of their teaching schedule requests, which the Undergraduate Studies Committee will review for approval. All faculty members have to do this every academic year prior to teaching 4990.