

History Department

Annual Assessment for AY 2024-25

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After a few years of reflection and curriculum revisions, this year we returned to assessing one of our Program Learning Outcomes (PLO).

Mission Statement – *revised since last submission*

The essence of historical inquiry is, simply put, to study and understand the past. The History Department at the University of San Francisco is a community of scholars and students who seek an informed and critical sense of the past and an awareness of the role of the past in shaping the present. Such an understanding is, we believe, the basis for effective and engaged citizenship in the contemporary world.

We seek to educate our students about the variety of past human experience within a global setting. Our courses similarly cover the span of human history from antiquity to modern times and utilize a range of methodological approaches. History at USF offers both breadth and depth into fields and specializations that reveal the complexity of human societies, past and present.

While we hope to impart a love of history and an appreciation of its value, we also aim to prepare our students for further study and professional development in the many areas in which history majors find employment, including (but not limited to) teaching, law, business, and the public sector. The study of history—with the training it provides in close reading, logical reasoning, careful argumentation, and persuasive writing—is an ideal major to prepare for “the real world.”

Removed section—since we changed our curriculum to remove regional emphases:

Toward that end, we offer six regional emphases within the history major, and students elect a single or a double emphasis in the histories of Africa, Asia, Europe, the Islamic World, Latin America, and the United States.

Program Learning Outcomes – *revised March 2024*

1. Understand the historical processes that have shaped human experiences across time and space;
2. Think critically and historically about the past;
3. Conduct historical research and craft persuasive historical arguments;
4. Understand how the practice of history can establish a valuable framework for considering ethical issues in the past and present.

Curricular Map – revised March 2024

	PLO 1	PLO 2	PLO 3	PLO 4	
Courses/Program Requirement	Understand the historical processes that have shaped human experiences across time and space	Think critically and historically about the past	Conduct historical research and craft persuasive historical arguments	Understand how the practice of history can establish a valuable framework for considering ethical issues in the past and present	
100-level survey courses	I, D	I	I	I, D	
200-level courses	D	I	D	D, M	
300-level	D, M	D, M	D	D	
400-level (Senior Seminar)	N/A	M	M	M	
Key: I = Introductory D = Developing M = Mastery N/A = Depends on instructor	We have sometimes listed two letters when we felt that our response is halfway between these two measures				

Assessment Schedule and Plan– Revised to be in line with PLO revision

Our last APR was in 2018-9, and the next is scheduled for fall 2028. We will assess one PLO per year until our next APR, although we may not do them in order

Academic Year	PLO assessed
2023-24	Year of Reflection due to curricular changes
2024-25	PLO 1
2025-6	PLO 4
2026-7	PLO 2
2027-8	PLO 3
2028-9	Next APR

Note: We switched the order of PLOs (in bold) due to the fact that we did not offer our HIST 400 Senior Seminar in AY 2025-2026. We will offer it in Fall 2026 and will then have seminar papers to evaluate. Instead we will evaluate PLO 4 for our next annual assessment as that course can be evaluated with the papers from HIST 396 History Internship which is being offered Spring 2026.

Methodology

The department agreed to assess PLO 1: Understand the historical processes that have shaped human experiences across time and space.

Papers were collected from the Fall 2024 HIST 400 seminar which enrolled 15 history majors. The names were redacted and a third of the papers were set aside to be rated.

A rubric was adapted from the rubric the course instructor used.

Category	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Below Expectations
Thesis	Thesis is clearly stated, easily identifiable, and analytical.	Thesis is offered but it is slightly unclear OR it lacks insight/originality OR is merely a description, not an analysis	Does not offer a statement of thesis, but simply a summary of information. OR is weakly stated, unclear, or patently false.
Knowledge and Use of Evidence	Demonstrates an excellent command of the topic through well-chosen and specific examples.	Demonstrates a solid command of research topic through a few examples. Some of the examples might be too general or vague.	Does not demonstrate a strong grasp of the topic, as indicated by either factual errors, insensitivity to historical context, or overly broad generalizations.

Use of Primary Sources	Demonstrates a close reading of the sources by referring to specific ideas and points.		Demonstrates adequate knowledge of the sources.		Does not demonstrate adequate knowledge of the sources, which are characterized incorrectly or superficially.	
Use of Secondary Sources	Makes factually accurate assertions supported by evidence.		Uses some factually accurate assertions, but weakly supported by evidence.		Does not incorporate factually accurate assertions and/or does not support them with evidence.	
Complexity	Grapples with the complexity of the past and of the historical sources.		Does not necessarily grapple with the complexity of the past.		Does not illustrate an understanding of the complexity of historical sources and circumstances.	
Historical Context	Demonstrates a sophisticated grasp of the broader historical context.		Demonstrates some understanding of the broader historical context, but not an in-depth understanding.		Does not demonstrate an understanding of the broader historical context.	

Two raters were selected: Elliot Neaman and Marty Claussen, both European historians. They read the papers, scored them using the rubric, and discussed their findings. They then drafted the analysis section of the report (below).

The department chair then compiled the report to submit. Considering the timing, the department has not yet discussed the report in full. This discussion will be during the first department meeting of 2026. At that time, an amended report will be submitted with the summary of the discussions, next steps, and how we will “close the loop.”

Analysis

The raters carefully read and discussed the five papers submitted from the History 400-level seminar from the Fall 2024 semester, and analyzed them both as pieces of historical scholarship as well as under the PLO. The PLO was further divided into six rubrics, regarding the presentation of each paper's thesis; its background knowledge and use of evidence; its use of both primary and secondary sources; the complexity of approaches; and its sensitivity to the historical context. All the papers were focused, roughly, on early modern period, and were, the notable exception of paper 3, generally concerned with matters of witchcraft and the

Occult (the topic of the seminar). The raters discussed their own individual assessments of the various papers' strengths and weaknesses, and used, on the following spreadsheet, the following system of marks to indicate the three assessment categories of "exceeds expectations," (+); "meets expectations" (*); or "below expectations (-).

Given the limited time students had to complete the assignment, including gaining enough knowledge of the historical context in which their primary sources were written, and researching and writing the papers, the raters found them generally to be at least competent and in general good.

A few stood out as much better: Paper 3 offered a lively read on Enlightenment pornographic literature, but was marred by an inadequate grasp of pertinent historiography (the student had not read Robert Darnton on the erotica of this period), and a critical stance that struck us as a little naïve. This was not held against the student considering that this was a semester project. Paper 4 was as sophisticated as anything that might be produced in a grad school paper.

On the other hand, Paper 1 failed to meet the readers' expectations in almost every way, even to the point where the name of the author of the primary source the student used was consistently misspelled, as was the title of the text itself.

The middle range of the papers were academically solid, and dealt with the chosen topics in a variety of ways. For instance, Paper 7 approached the paper through an interesting lens of early capitalism and social climbing in Britain, while Paper 2 took a more theological and ritual approach, analyzing the attitudes of the various Christian sects in early modern Europe regarding exorcism and its rites from the early modern period to the present.

In general, the papers as a group met expectations as to PLO 1: they almost all showed a reasonable command of the historical context; they almost all wrestled with the complexity of the topic (some more successfully than others); they almost all had a clear and well-argued thesis. As one would expect in a single semester course, where many of the papers fell short was their command of the secondary literature. Given the enormous amount of scholarship on this continually intriguing topic, that is not surprising. And who would expect any non-professional historian to engage in Keith Thomas's 800+ page *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, a classic, although an outdated one, let alone the plethora of more recent work?

Paper #	1. Thesis	2. Knowledge/ Use of Evidence	3. Primary Sources	4. Secondary Sources	5. Complexity	6. Context
1	-	-	*	-	-	-
2	*	*	-	*	-	-
3	+	*	+	-	*	*
4	+	*	+	+	+	+
7	-	*	*	*	+	+

“exceeds expectations” (+), “meets expectations” (*), or “below expectations (-)

1. Thesis: Exceeds (2/5), Meets (1/5), Below (2/5)= Exceeds or meets: 60%
2. Knowledge/Evidence: Exceeds (0/5), Meets (4/5), Below (1/5)= Exceeds or meets: 80%
3. Primary Sources: Exceeds (2/5), Meets (2/5), Below (1/5)= Exceeds or meets: 80%
4. Secondary Sources: Exceeds (1/5), Meets (2/5), Below (2/5)= Exceeds or meets: 60%
5. Complexity: Exceeds (2/5), Meets (1/5), Below (2/5)= Exceeds or meets: 60%
6. Context: Exceeds (2/5), Meets (1/5), Below (2/5)= Exceeds or meets: 60%

Department Discussion

The department was generally satisfied with the findings of this PLO assessment. The majority of our students met or exceeded our expectations in all six categories evaluated. We did discuss again the challenges of this type of assessment: for example, the diversity of students’ previous coursework and the limited time to access and read both primary and secondary sources. Overall, we think our students showed a good grasp of historical method, intellectual curiosity, and written expression.

“Closing the Loop”—Next Steps

We took the opportunity to revise our mission statement and assessment calendar (both discussed above.) For AY 2025-2026, we will use the final papers from HIST 396 History Internship to evaluate PLO 4: Understand how the practice of history can establish a valuable framework for considering ethical issues in the past and present.

