As mandated by the Department of History, this is the annual report on the department’s assessment process. During the spring semester of AY 2019-2020 the Department of History assessed its undergraduate History program. The results are below under five headings.

1. Learning outcomes.

The Department of History has five program learning outcomes.

A) Evaluate debates among historians by identifying the ways in which questions about race, gender, class, ethnicity, region, religion, and other factors influence the historical narratives we write.

B) Formulate historical questions and articulate a viable research project using historical methodologies.

C) Explain the influence of political ideologies, economic structures, social organizations, culture, and/or environments on the ways historical subjects have lived, acted, and/or thought in particular periods and places.

D) Identify, critically analyze, and assess information and interpretations drawn from a range of sources and perspectives.

E) Construct and support an historical argument with evidence from a variety of primary and secondary sources.

The department developed these five program learning outcomes at the conclusion of a multi-year process. The department first participated in the development of a list of course objectives as part of the “Tuning Process” sponsored by the Lumina Foundation, carried out in collaboration with other history departments across the state, and reflective of discipline-specific standards as supported by our national professional organization—the American Historical Association. Based on these course objectives, the members of the department Undergraduate Committee proposed five program learning outcomes that were subsequently approved by the department. Our degree program requires two courses of all history majors (History 3100 and History 4990) that provide a mid-way and end-of-degree program assessment. The first two program
learning outcomes are linked to History 3100, the next three with History 4990. Each course is evaluated in alternating years.

2. Outcomes Assessed.

In the spring semester of AY 2019-2020, the Undergraduate Committee—working under the department’s Associate Chair and Undergraduate Advisor (the latter trained in using The Associator and The Reviewer)—assessed the sample course materials from History 3100. They evaluated these materials using the first two learning outcomes listed above.

3. Plan for Assessing the Outcome.

As Chair, my primary responsibility in this process is to insure that a) the assessment takes place as scheduled, b) that the Undergraduate Committee, Associate Chair, and Undergraduate Advisor work together smoothly, and c) that any recommendations and/or commendations are identified and scheduled/implemented going into the next academic year.

4. Implementation of Assessment.

The implementation of the assessment went smoothly. On the process, when polled, colleagues who performed the assessment reported no problems. One said, “On the whole it was much quicker and easier than I expected.” A different colleague wrote, “I would also stress that the process went smoothly” noting that this was because the department had aligned the goals of History 3100 with the assessment criteria. The Associate Chair and the Undergraduate Advisor also reported no difficulties in carrying out their roles in the assessment implementation.

5. Results.

For the assessment, members of the Undergraduate Committee assessed the “Final Research Proposal” for History 3100. This proposal is the culmination of the course and is a springboard for a research paper taken up in History 4990. Two evaluating faculty members used a random sample of eight papers in the assessment; each paper was evaluated by both committee members. For evaluating History 3100, colleagues used Learning Outcomes A and B. When we evaluate History 4990, we will use Learning Outcomes C, D, and E. The first evaluation scored degrees of mastery. No students scored zero points in this category, while the majority placed at the “good mastery” level. The second highest category was “excellent mastery” with only one paper at the “minimal mastery” level. In the second evaluation, students scored in an upward arc with one at the “some mastery” level, two at the “good mastery” level, and five at the “excellent mastery” level.

6. Outcomes

Our assessment concluded as the University of Utah shifted to off-campus and online teaching due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, the department has not yet been able
to fully process the results of the assessment. The entire department will receive this report and discuss the findings at the next department meeting scheduled for 21 August 2020. However, based on my review of the process, I would offer the following conclusions and suggestions. First, the department’s choice to link History 3100, History 4990, and its learning outcomes and assessment plan has paid dividends. Students and faculty alike engaged in these courses have a clear and consistent understanding of what is expected and what to teach. This has made our ability to assess our success much easier. Second, the process of selecting a specific assignment from the course and making it available to the committee members for review has worked well. This is our first time through the process, but overall it seems to have been efficient and none too onerous. We have evaluated History 3100 this year and will evaluate History 4990 next year. In sum, the assessment took place as scheduled and worked smoothly.

I have two recommendations for future assessments and departmental strategy. First, AY 2019-2020 was historic in the department with a record number of faculty on leave or otherwise unable to serve on committees. As such, the Undergraduate Committee was unusually small. In the future, this should not be a problem, but at least three faculty members for any given assessment should participate in the process. And second, I propose that faculty teaching History 3100 and 4990 meet each spring with those colleagues scheduled to teach these courses in the coming year and share strategies and evaluations of what is working and what can be improved. The Department Chair, Associate Chair and Undergraduate Advisor could convene this meeting. The meeting could be timed to coincide with the new fall schedule being posted.

I wish to recognize the work done by: previous department chairs who guided the department through the “tuning” process; previous Associate Chairs and Undergraduate Committee members; Rebecca Horn (current Associate Chair and Undergraduate Committee Chair); Ama Scott (current Undergraduate Advisor); current members of the Undergraduate Committee; and colleagues at large for working together to evaluate, craft, and implement the department’s learning goals and objectives.