2012

Developing Portfolio-Based Assessment for History Students: Phase I

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In the early 1990s, the Department of History began a series of curricular reforms designed to update and streamline its undergraduate curriculum. Over the next decade, as the department and University grew exponentially, the faculty responded to these challenges by once again implementing a major curricular overhaul. In both cases, particularly the more recent episode, the department used available assessment data to guide its choices. While the faculty-led and assessment-driven reforms to this point have helped us determine what we want students to be achieving as they move through our programs, we do not yet have the most effective assessment tools to tell us whether or not they are meeting those expectations. The purpose of this grant is to begin to take our assessment efforts to the next level by developing, designing, and implementing portfolio programs for all of our undergraduate majors that will provide better tools with which to measure longitudinally the growth in historical writing skills during students’ time in the program.

Over the course of this year, we have designed and developed portfolio templates for all our programs, introduced the portfolio system to students in our core introductory course, HIST2900, implemented a plan to collect writing-based artifacts from those students in their 3000- and 4000- level courses.

Survey Data

Along with a renewed focus on assessment of student writing, we have retooled and significantly expanded our entrance and exit interviews to provide a much larger sample size and to better gauge the expectations of incoming students.

Customized iWebFolio Templates

In HIST2900, students from all three of our majors design and customize their own portfolios with personal and professional goals in mind, uploading artifacts that meet the content and skill guidelines for our introductory course.

Updated Assessment Tools and Rubrics

As they progress through the curriculum, students update their professional materials and upload artifacts from intermediate level courses.

Faculty Assessment

The department assessment committee accesses the writing artifacts through iWebFolio, assessing the degree to which students have met content and skill guidelines for each level and the longitudinal progress of students over time.

Summary and Future Plans

Over the course of the year, we have made tremendous progress in laying the foundation for the transition to a portfolio-based assessment plan for the Department of History. With the basic infrastructure now in place, the challenge is to integrate the collection of artifacts into our upper-level writing intensive and baccalaureate writing courses and to implement a revised assessment plan. By the end of the fall 2012 semester, we should have sufficient baseline data to provide the faculty with a rationale for updating the assessment plan. With faculty approval in early 2013, we can complete the transition and implement fully a portfolio-based assessment system worth of our curriculum, our faculty, and our students.