

# INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS REPORT

## GENERAL EDUCATION

**Name of Program/Department:** Department of History

**Year:** 2021-2022

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### PROGRAM MISSION

The mission of the History Department is to train the intellect of and to prepare students for lives of personal enrichment and constructive achievement. The study of History comprises the elements of a liberal education: the acquisition of knowledge, the nurturing of understanding, and the development of perspective of oneself and one's society. The reconstruction of the human past conveys an appreciation of cultural contexts and traditions, and it enhances critical thinking and communication skills. The major in History provides a broad understanding of the development of various cultures throughout the world. Through their History courses, FMU students gain a better grasp of contemporary events, a knowledge of people in various times and places, critical thinking skills, and the ability to express themselves effectively in oral and written communication.

### GENERAL EDUCATION – HISTORY-RELATED STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

There are three goals of the General Education curriculum that are related to History:

- Goal 1: The ability to compose effectively with rhetorical awareness, integrate relevant research when appropriate, and produce developed, insightful arguments.
- Goal 6: The ability to recognize historical processes, to identify historical periodization, and to explain historical connections among individuals, groups, and ideas around the world.
- Goal 7: The ability to recognize diverse social and cultural practices and to articulate connections between individual behavior and sociocultural processes.

To measure its performance in meeting these three goals, the History Department relies on four of its eleven Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):

- SLO 2.1: The student can effectively offer analysis that supports the thesis statement.
- SLO 4.0: The student could effectively write an historical essay.
- SLO 5.0: The student could accurately explain how people have existed, acted, and thought in particular historical periods.
- SLO 5.1: The student would be able to demonstrate an understanding of cause and effect with a broad knowledge of the general chronology of historical developments in a variety of civilizations.

While all four of these SLOs contribute to meeting Goal 1, the clearest connection with that goal comes from SLOs 2.1 and 4.0. SLO 5.0 is most relevant to Goal 6, while SLO 5.1 contributes to meeting Goal 7.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - REVISE

A key objective of the Department of History at Francis Marion University is to offer a balanced curriculum of courses in U.S., European, and world history. The department offers five courses that non-majors may take to complete their General Education requirements: HIST 101 (U.S. History to 1877), HIST 102 (U.S. History since 1877), HIST 103 (European History to the French Revolution), HIST 104 (European History since the French Revolution), and HIST 105 (Introduction to Modern World History). To assess student success in meeting the goals listed above, the History Department has adopted indirect and direct methods. The former is addressed through a survey given once a semester to students in 100-level courses. To directly assess students' abilities, the department uses a "Course-Level Assessment" (CLA) form that is filled out twice a semester for each class and that relies on a rubric to judge students' written work. A total of 715 students in 100-level courses took the survey during the 2021-2022 school year, while instructors in the History Department filled out CLA forms for students in those classes during the same time period.

The department set for itself benchmarks of 80% to meet the four SLOs listed above and, by extension, the General Education goals. In its 2020-2021 General Education report, the department met none of its benchmarks, and the same proved true in 2021-2022. Indeed, overall, the department performed worse in 2021-2022 than in the previous school year. That observation, however, should be placed in the context of two other observations. First, there is strong evidence that the Covid pandemic offers at least a partial explanation for a decline in student performance. Indeed, it is likely that the overwhelming majority of students who came to FMU in the fall of 2021 had been affected by the impact of Covid on their high schools,<sup>1</sup> which may account for the particularly poor performance on their midterms in the fall semester. Second, with the exception of SLO 4.0, student performance consistently improved as the school year progressed. In fact, in two cases (SLO 2.1 and 5.1), the students' final exam scores met the department's benchmark, and in a third case (SLO 5.0), the benchmark was nearly met. There is thus reason for optimism that the decision of the university to emphasize in-class learning,<sup>2</sup> in

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<sup>1</sup> Megan Kuhfeld, Jim Soland, Karyn Lewis, and Emily Morton, "The Pandemic Has Had Devastating Impacts on Learning. What Will It Take to Help Students Catch Up?," Brookings Institution (3 March 2022), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2022/03/03/the-pandemic-has-had-devastating-impacts-on-learning-what-will-it-take-to-help-students-catch-up/>.

<sup>2</sup> Looking at more than 1000 schools in Connecticut, that state's Department of Education concluded, "Those who learned in in-person settings during the 2020-21 school year lost the least ground academically....That trend held true across all grades and most student groups. Those students who learned in hybrid or fully remote models showed 'substantially weaker achievement and growth during the pandemic.'" See "Report Shows Impact of Pandemic on Students' Performance," WVIT News, 27 March 2022, <https://www.nbcconnecticut.com/news/coronavirus/report-shows-impact-of-pandemic-on-students-performance/2749061/>.

combination with the action items the department enacted in the 2020-2021 school year, are having a positive effect on student performance.

## STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

### *Methods of Measurement*

To measure those SLOs related to the General Education goals, the department relies on one direct and one indirect measurement.

#### **Direct Measurement**

The department utilizes a Course-Level Assessment form that is filled out twice for each History course, first at midterm and then again at the end of the semester. This form assesses students' writing and analytical skills, with the professor indicating the number of students who exceeded, met, or did not meet expectations. This is very similar to Lawshe's Content Validity Ratio that is used by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation. Lawshe's Ratio relies on a judging panel to determine if the content of a particular assignment is "essential," "useful but not essential," or "not necessary."

The following table shows the results of the CLA forms for the fall and spring for each of the four SLOs. The percentage reflects those students who "met" or "exceeded" expectations.

<b><i>SLO</i></b>	<b><i>FALL 2021 Midterm</i></b>	<b><i>FALL 2021 Final</i></b>	<b><i>SPRING 2022 Midterm</i></b>	<b><i>SPRING 2022 Final</i></b>
<b>2.1</b>	67.7%	76.3%	77.7%	80.7%
<b>4.0</b>	70%	79.2%	79.4%	77.9%
<b>5.0</b>	69.2%	76.3%	77.7%	79.5%
<b>5.1</b>	68.4%	77.2%	80%	80.4%

#### **Indirect Measurement**

Around the middle of each semester, the department gives an on-line survey to students in all History classes. There are two such surveys, one for lower-level courses and an expanded survey for upper-level classes. The former consists of 24 questions and asks students a variety of questions, including several related directly to SLOs 2.1, 4.0, 5.0, and 5.1, such as whether: 1) they can write an essay that supports a thesis statement with evidence; 2) they feel prepared to write a historical essay; 3) they can discern the relationship between cause and effect at particular time periods; and 4) they can see connections between historical events, ideas, and values over time.

## ***The SLOs***

In its 2018-2019 IE report, the History Department established a benchmark of 80% for SLOs 2.1, 4.0, 5.0, and 5.1; in the 2020-2021 school year, it raised its benchmark for SLO 4.0 to 81% but kept the benchmark the same for the other three SLOs. Those benchmarks have since that time remained unchanged.

## ***Results***

The results that follow are for General Education (100-level) courses only:

### **SLO 2.1 The student could effectively offer analysis that supported the thesis statement.**

Lower-division (100-level courses) on-line survey. Results: 79% **Benchmark Not Attained**  
Course-Level Assessments (Qualitative Analysis). Results: 74.3% **Benchmark Not Attained**  
**Average: 76.7%** **Benchmark Not Attained**

### **SLO 4.0 The student could effectively write an historical essay.**

Lower-division (100-level courses) on-line survey. Results: 70% **Benchmark Not Attained**  
Course-Level Assessments (Writing). Results: 76.8% **Benchmark Not Attained**  
**Average: 73.4%** **Benchmark Not Attained**

### **SLO 5.0 The student could accurately explain how people have existed, acted, and thought in particular historical periods.**

Lower-division (100-level courses) on-line survey. Results: 78.5% **Benchmark Not Attained**  
Course-Level Assessments (Critical Thinking). Results: 75.1% **Benchmark Not Attained**  
**Grand Total: 76.8%** **Benchmark Not Attained**

### **SLO 5.1 Would be able to demonstrate an understanding of cause and effect with a broad knowledge of the general chronology of historical developments in a variety of civilizations.**

Lower-division (100-level courses) on-line survey. Results: 79% **Benchmark Not Attained**  
Course-Level Assessments (Area Knowledge). Results: 75.8% **Benchmark Not Attained**  
**Grand Total: 77.4%** **Benchmark Not Attained**

## ***History Department Action Items***

It is clear from the data that students in General Education courses in most cases are confident in their abilities, but, with the exception of SLO 4.0, did not perform as well on their assignments as they thought they would. Compared to the 2020-2021 school year—see the chart on the next page—the department witnessed a dramatic regression in student performance in the fall semester of the 2021-2022 school year, especially on the midterm; this may be attributed, at least in part, to the lingering effects of Covid. However, with the exception of SLO 4.0, student performance consistently improved. The spring semester was particularly telling: on the midterm, students did better in the spring of 2022 than they did in the corresponding semester

for 2021 when it came to SLOs 4.0 and 5.1; with the exception of SLO 5.0, the students in the spring of 2022 outperformed those a year prior.

**Action Items for 2021-2022**

<b>SLO</b>	<b>FALL 2020 Midterm</b>	<b>FALL 2020 Final</b>	<b>SPRING 2021 Midterm</b>	<b>SPRING 2021 Final</b>
<b>2.1</b>	76.4%	79.8%	78.4%	75.3%
<b>4.0</b>	80.8%	82.6%	78.4%	76.7%
<b>5.0</b>	74%	79.8%	78.2%	83.8%
<b>5.1</b>	76%	83.4%	78.9%	75.3%

Despite the fact that student performance in 2021-2022 in most cases consistently improved, the department again met none of its benchmarks; this points to the need for the department to continue its efforts to “close the loop,” that is, adopt measures to enhance student performance. These measures (action items) are divided into two categories, those that are broader in nature and those that are SLO-specific. Because there are indications that the actions the department took to improve student performance are bearing fruit—as indicated by the scores for the spring semester—these action items are largely the same as the year before.

**Broader Actions**

- The department will continue to emphasize to students the importance of budgeting time to prepare for tests, especially final exams.
- Professors in all General Education History classes need to emphasize to students the importance of the skills and knowledge required of them to perform well on their writing assignments. This applies not only to in-class essays, but take-home assignments.
- Given that the coronavirus may continue to affect classes, the department will urge all professors to be knowledgeable in the use of technology to impart information and deliver assignments.
  - In connection with the above action item, the department has used ARPA funds provided in 2022 to purchase technology that will permit professors to offer virtual or hybrid courses should such a need arise.

**SLO-Specific Actions**

**SLO 2.1 The student can effectively offer analysis that supported the thesis statement.**

The department will take the following measures to improve this SLO:

- Require students to visit the Writing Center for all History courses.

- Provide a clearer understanding that an essay has a thesis statement, and that the essay needs to provide not just narrative (who, when, and what), but to explain how and why events occurred as they did.
- Encourage instructors to make clearer distinctions between what is narrative in their lectures and assignments, and what is analysis.
- Devote greater attention to essay- and paper-writing so that students understand a paper requires not only narrative but analysis to defend the argument they are trying to make.

**SLO 4.0 The student could effectively write an historical essay.**

The department will take the following measures to improve this SLO:

- Require students to visit the Writing Center for all History courses.
- The department has taken additional steps to improve essay-writing—including the creation of a Power Point on that subject—but has to devote greater emphasis to this subject.

**SLO 5.0 The student could accurately explain how people have existed, acted, and thought in particular historical periods.**

The department will take the following measures to improve this SLO:

- Require students to visit the Writing Center for all History courses.
- Emphasize to students that History is the study of not simply groups or institutions, but of individuals whose decisions and actions many times have far-reaching consequences.
- Make sure students understand that a variety of forces lead to societal change over time, and that by looking at those particular historical periods one can more clearly discern why individuals at those points in time made the decisions and/or took the actions they did.

**SLO 5.1 The student would be able to demonstrate an understanding of cause and effect with a broad knowledge of the general chronology of historical developments in a variety of civilizations.**

The department will take the following measures to improve this SLO:

- Redouble its efforts to make sure students understand the importance of historical chronology. In turn, they will better see that the actions taken by individuals or the events that have taken place have one or more precursors.
- Be clear to students that those precursors can change over time; hence, what may have caused an event to take place at one point in time may not necessarily lead to a similar outcome later, even though the variables themselves may seem analogous.
- Require students to visit the Writing Center for all History courses.