History MA Assessment Report, 2013-2014 Academic Year

Expected Outcomes: Historical Knowledge
Graduates of the M.A. programs will exhibit a strong knowledge of the general area in which they specialize: American, European, or Latin American history, or the history of technology.

Related typical general education outcomes: None

Assessment method: Oral Examination
Under a new assessment system introduced in spring 2014 (Appendix 1), M.A. students taking oral examinations should be assessed at a benchmark level of “2” or better on their M.A. oral exams by the examining committee. M.A. students taking oral examinations and/or graduating in fall 2013 were not assessed under this new rubric.

Findings:
To date in the 2013-2014 academic year, 9 students graduated with M.A. degrees, and 2 direct track Ph.D. students earned the MANT degree (Masters Non-Thesis) as a credential accompanying successful passage through the preliminary exam process. 2 of the M.A. students took oral examinations after the introduction of a new assessment instrument. These students’ level of historical knowledge and their ability to mobilize it was assessed using three distinct criteria on an evaluation rubric filled out by the examiners after the oral examination. All students achieved at least the benchmark level of 2 for all three criteria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average (mean)</th>
<th>Highest</th>
<th>Lowest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Context and Purpose for Writing</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Development</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Defense</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


All the other MA students, taking oral examinations during fall 2014, were judged “good” or better on the examinations.

How did you use findings for improvement?
Building on a policy change passed in 2011-2012 to broaden M.A. students’ coursework options, the Graduate Committee and Graduate Program Officer (GPO) have continued to emphasize the importance of M.A.-track grad students taking courses that build historical knowledge both in their field and more broadly. The Graduate Committee, noting that this assessment was only of two students and therefore relatively unrepresentative, will continue to collect and monitor new assessment data over the course of AY 2014-2015 in order to ascertain the extent to which this policy is working. It will, as noted in the department’s 2012-2013 assessment report, create a comparable assessment tool for MANT students sitting preliminary examinations from fall 2015.

Additional comments: None
**Expected Outcomes: Research Skills**

M.A. students will develop the skills necessary to plan and carry out comprehensive programs of research, identifying and locating relevant secondary literature, archives and/or with other substantial collections of primary sources.

**Related typical general education outcomes:** None

**Assessment method: Defense of M.A. theses.**

Students in the M.A. program must produce a thesis offering a strong historical argument, presented in historiographical context, and grounded in extensive original research conducted in archives and/or with other substantial collections of primary sources. Full-time students will be expected to be able to complete and defend their theses within two academic years of entering the program. Under a new assessment system introduced in spring 2014 (Appendix 1), M.A. students taking oral examinations should be assessed at a benchmark level of “2” or better on their M.A. oral exams by the examining committee. M.A. students taking oral examinations and/or graduating in fall 2013 were not assessed under this new rubric.

**Findings:**

To date in the 2011-2012 academic year, 9 students successfully completed and defended M.A. theses. 2 of these M.A. students took oral examinations after the introduction of a new assessment instrument. These students’ research skills were assessed using three distinct criteria on an evaluation rubric filled out by the examiners after the oral examination. All students achieved at least the benchmark level of 2 for all three criteria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average (mean)</th>
<th>Highest</th>
<th>Lowest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analysis and Interpretation in Context of Secondary Sources</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Primary Sources</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


All the other MA students, taking oral examinations during fall 2014, were judged “good” or better on the examinations.

**How did you use findings for improvement?**

The Graduate Committee noting that this assessment was only of two students and therefore relatively unrepresentative, will continue to collect and monitor new assessment data over the course of AY 2014-2015. It will also continue to monitor and remediate current students’ learning and retention of research skills using a less formal survey of students’ basic research skills developed by history faculty in partnership with Auburn University Libraries faculty. (Appendix 2). This survey is carried out two “core” seminars, “Historical Methods” (Hist7700) which students normally take in their first semester in the program and the “Research and Writing Seminar” (Hist7710) in which M.A. students produce the first chapter or section of their thesis, normally during their third semester in the program. In both classes, the Instructor of Record uses the survey as an instrument to tackle specific research skill deficits directly. In future years, it is hoped that, by comparing results of surveys taken by students in Historical Methods to those taken by the same students in the
Research and Writing Seminar, the Graduate Committee will be able to study the issue of students’ retention of research skills as they move through the program.

**Additional comments:** Another key test of research skills, recognized in the historical profession, is the time taken by students to complete the degree. Full-time students will be expected to be able to complete and defend their theses within two academic years of entering the program. In previous years, the graduate committee noted concerns with time to degree. This AY 2013-2014, all three entrants to the program in 2012 will defend their theses within two academic years. In addition, seven students who commenced the program in fall 2011 or earlier also completed their degrees in AY 2013-2014.

**Expected Outcomes: Public Presentation of Historical Scholarship**
M.A. graduates will become effective written and oral communicators and contributors to historical scholarship, able to present arguments and evidence clearly and coherently,

**Assessment method #1: Defense of M.A. theses.**
Students in the M.A. program must produce a thesis offering a strong historical argument grounded in evidence. Under a new assessment system introduced in spring 2014 (*Appendix 1*), M.A. students taking oral examinations should be assessed at a benchmark level of “2” or better on their M.A. oral exams by the examining committee. M.A. students taking oral examinations and/or graduating in fall 2013 were not assessed under this new rubric.

**Findings #1:**
In the 2011-2012 academic year, 9 students successfully completed and defended M.A. theses. 2 of these M.A. students took oral examinations after the introduction of a new assessment instrument. These students’ written and oral communication skills were assessed using two distinct criteria on an evaluation rubric filled out by the examiners after the oral examination. All students achieved at least the benchmark level of 2 for all three criteria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average (mean)</th>
<th>Highest</th>
<th>Lowest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Genre and Disciplinary Conventions</em></td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Control of Syntax and Mechanics</em></td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


All the other MA students, taking oral examinations during Fall 2014, were judged “good” or better on the examinations.

**How did you use findings for improvement? #1**
The fact that neither student surveyed received a 4 in any of the two assessment criteria is a cause for concern. The Graduate Committee, while noting that this assessment was only of two students and therefore relatively unrepresentative, will continue to collect and monitor new assessment data over the course of AY 2014-2015, and will discuss means of remediation if it is deemed necessary.

**Assessment method #2: Graduate Colloquium Performance**
As of spring 2014, it was formally required for all graduate students, Ph.D.-track and M.A.-track alike (was previously only required of PhD students) to present at the PAT annual department research colloquium. A committee of faculty evaluated these research presentations using a new
survey instrument introduced for the first time in AY 2013-2014 (Appendix 2). Awards are given for outstanding papers.

**Findings #2:**
M.A. students required to present at the colloquium all fulfilled their obligation. In all, 3 M.A. students presented. Faculty assessed presenters on the basis of six distinct criteria. The benchmark score was 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Average (mean)</th>
<th>Highest</th>
<th>Lowest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Thesis</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Materials</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery techniques</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to extemporize</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total students surveyed: 3. Total assessment forms completed: 12.

The fact that at least one assessor scored a student below the benchmark for each of the six criteria of assessment is a cause for concern. The Graduate Committee, however, recognized a number of contingencies which may have skewed the data. First of all, although the Graduate Committee decided in 2012-2013 to move the colloquium to late January so it would not take place at a time when M.A. students’ attention is focused on completing their theses, a University closure forced the department to delay the colloquium to late March. Secondly, 6/12 of the assessment forms filled out were for a single student. This student was in only in her second semester in the program when she presented and had had relatively little opportunity to develop her oral presentation skills within the program.

**How did you use findings for improvement? #2**
The Graduate Committee will attempt once more to schedule the Colloquium in January and will consider a policy revision limiting M.A. presentations to second-year students to come into effect in spring 2016. It will also collect new assessment data in spring 2015 and, if low scores continue to be in evidence, will discuss and devise means to remedy the issue.

**Additional comments:** Faculty members continue to encourage graduate students to present their work both inside (as part of the Graduate School 3-minute and Research-week presentation competitions) and outside the University. Additionally, a number of graduate students presented at regional and graduate student conferences in 2012-2013, and more are slated to in the months ahead. The Department is limited by College policy in the amount of financial aid it can give to students wishing to attend and present at conferences. The Graduate Committee will more effectively survey external presentations with the introduction of annual reports in spring/summer 2015.

**Expected Outcomes: Placement**
Graduates of the M.A. programs will be highly competitive in the job market.

**Related typical general education outcomes:** None

Survey graduates of the MA program to determine what percentage are successfully employed within three years of completion of degree (Appendix 3).

Findings:
Following the advice of Auburn University’s Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, the department abandoned its practice of reporting back based on faculty knowledge, which allowed the department to account for the job placement of 100% of students. Instead, the department launched a new formal survey instrument. The survey was addressed by email to students who graduated in the last three years (since fall 2011). 19 MA students and 6 MANT students received the questionnaire. The department received responses from 11 MA and 3 MANT graduates, 58% and 50% respectively. The survey revealed that, in this cohort,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30.77% (4)</td>
<td>were employed in a professional capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.77% (4)</td>
<td>were continuing in graduate education at Auburn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.38% (2)</td>
<td>were continuing in graduate education at another institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.08% (3)</td>
<td>other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 student did not respond to this question.

The 4 students now working in a professional capacity were employed in a university administrative role, in the United States army, and in public history positions (at the University of West Alabama and the Oklahoma History Center). The 3 students who chose “other” include the most recent graduate of the program, who only completed the degree within the last month. We expect his employment status to change over the coming year. Only one other graduate from 2011-2014 is currently still unemployed. The third student choosing “other” has just been awarded a Presidential Management Fellowship as further training before working for the US Government.

In addition to tracking job placement, the survey asked respondents to assess the program from the perspective of recent graduates. The response was overwhelmingly positive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not much (1)</th>
<th>A little (2)</th>
<th>A good deal (3)</th>
<th>A lot (4)</th>
<th>Average (mean)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did your time at Auburn increase your level of historical knowledge?</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>23.08%</td>
<td>76.92%</td>
<td>3.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you become more effective as a researcher over the course of your degree at Auburn?</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did your training at Auburn make you a better communicator and/or presenter?</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>23.08%</td>
<td>69.23%</td>
<td>3.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to the criteria above, and noting the importance of archival or public history training, respondents identified writing and oral communication skills as aspects of training at Auburn that “helped ... most since completing the program”

**How did you use findings for improvement?**
The survey shows that M.A. students, particularly those who also complete our Graduate Certificates in Archival Studies and Public History, continue to be highly competitive in the job market and in terms of Ph.D. program placement.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Distinction</th>
<th>Benchmark</th>
<th>Inadequate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>Context of and Purpose for Writing. Includes considerations of audience, purpose, and the circumstances surrounding the writing task.</td>
<td>Demonstrates a thorough understanding of context, audience, and purpose that is responsive to the assigned task and focuses all elements of the work.</td>
<td>Demonstrates adequate consideration of context, audience, and purpose and a clear focus on the assigned task (e.g., the task aligns with audience, purpose, and context).</td>
<td>Demonstrates minimal attention to context, audience, purpose, and to assigned task (e.g., expectation of instructor or self as audience).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Content Development</td>
<td>Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to illustrate mastery of the subject, conveying the writer's understanding, and shaping the whole work.</td>
<td>Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to explore ideas within the context of the discipline and shape the whole work.</td>
<td>Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop and explore ideas through most of the work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Genre and Disciplinary Conventions. Formal and informal rules inherent in the expectations for writing in history.</td>
<td>Demonstrates detailed attention to and successful execution of a wide range of conventions particular to history and this writing task, including: organization, content, presentation, formatting, citations, and stylistic choices.</td>
<td>Demonstrates consistent use of important conventions particular to this discipline and writing task, including organization, content, presentation, citation, and stylistic choices.</td>
<td>Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop and explore ideas through most of the work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analysis and Interpretation in Context of Secondary Sources</td>
<td>Demonstrates skillful and critical engagement with the most appropriate, high-quality, relevant secondary sources to develop ideas that are appropriate for an original research project in history.</td>
<td>Demonstrates consistent and critical engagement with relevant secondary sources to develop ideas that are appropriate for an original research project in history.</td>
<td>Demonstrates an attempt to use relevant secondary sources to develop ideas that are appropriate for an original research project in history.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use of Primary Sources</td>
<td>Demonstrates skillful and critical use of high-quality, relevant primary sources to develop ideas that are appropriate for an original research project in history.</td>
<td>Demonstrates consistent and critical use of relevant primary sources to support ideas that are appropriate for an original research project in history.</td>
<td>Demonstrates an attempt to use relevant primary sources to support ideas that are appropriate for an original research project in history.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control of Syntax and Mechanics</td>
<td>Uses graceful language that skillfully communicates meaning to readers with clarity and fluency, and is virtually error-free.</td>
<td>Uses straightforward language that generally conveys meaning to readers. The language has few errors.</td>
<td>Uses language that generally conveys meaning to readers with clarity, although writing may include some errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oral defense. Answering questions with facility and with a command of necessary information.</td>
<td>Impressive extemporaneous performance, drawing on a high level of knowledge, providing comprehensive answers to more sophisticated questions, and relating answers skillfully back to the presentation.</td>
<td>Comfortable speaking extemporaneously, demonstrating a good level of knowledge, and answering more sophisticated questions with explanations and useful elaboration.</td>
<td>Somewhat comfortable speaking extemporaneously. Can provide answers to both rudimentary and more sophisticated questions but is tentative or fails to elaborate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet level 1 performance.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Distinction</th>
<th>Benchmark</th>
<th>Inadequate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4/4</td>
<td><strong>Organization.</strong> Specific introduction and conclusion, sequenced material within the body, and transitions</td>
<td>Organization, clearly and consistently observable, is skillful and makes the content of the presentation cohesive.</td>
<td>Organization is clearly and consistently observable within the presentation.</td>
<td>Organization is intermittently observable within the presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Central Thesis.</strong></td>
<td>Central thesis is compelling (precisely stated, appropriately repeated, memorable, and strongly supported.)</td>
<td>Central thesis is clear and consistent with the supporting material.</td>
<td>Central thesis is basically understandable but is not often repeated and is not memorable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Supporting Materials.</strong> Includes evidence, explanations, examples, illustrations, statistics, analogies, quotations from or appropriate references to relevant authorities.</td>
<td>Supporting materials make appropriate reference to information or analysis that significantly supports the presentation or establishes the presenter's credibility/authority on the topic.</td>
<td>Supporting materials make appropriate reference to information or analysis that generally supports the presentation or establishes the presenter's credibility/authority on the topic.</td>
<td>Supporting materials make reference to information or analysis that minimally supports the presentation or establishes the presenter's credibility/authority on the topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Language.</strong></td>
<td>Language choices are imaginative, memorable, and compelling, and enhance the effectiveness of the presentation. Language in presentation is appropriate to audience.</td>
<td>Language choices are thoughtful and generally support the effectiveness of the presentation. Language in presentation is appropriate to audience.</td>
<td>Language choices are mundane and commonplace and partially support the effectiveness of the presentation. Language in presentation is appropriate to audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Delivery techniques.</strong> Includes posture, gesture, eye contact, and vocal expressiveness.</td>
<td>Delivery techniques make the presentation compelling, and speaker appears polished and confident.</td>
<td>Delivery techniques make the presentation interesting, and speaker appears comfortable.</td>
<td>Delivery techniques make the presentation understandable, and speaker appears tentative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Ability to extemporize.</strong> Answering audience questions with facility and with a command of necessary information.</td>
<td>Impressive extemporaneous performance, drawing on a high level of knowledge, providing comprehensive answers to more sophisticated questions, and relating answers skillfully back to the presentation.</td>
<td>Comfortable speaking extemporaneously, demonstrating a good level of knowledge, and answering more sophisticated questions with explanations and useful elaboration.</td>
<td>Somewhat comfortable speaking extemporaneously. Can provide answers to both rudimentary and more sophisticated questions but is tentative or fails to elaborate.</td>
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Evaluators are encouraged to assign a **zero** to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (1/4) level performance.
Evaluation Rubric for AU History Grad Colloquium Presentations
Adapted from AACU Oral Communication VALUE Rubric

Student name: ___________________________ Spring ______
Presentation Title: _____________________________

Additional Comments:
_________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
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_________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

I agree for these comments to be passed on to the student’s major adviser (please tick) ☐

Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (1/4) level performance.
Appendix 3:
Survey of Successful Graduates (M.A), 2011-2014

All the information you provide in this survey will remain within the department. We need to know your name so that we can tie the information collected to specific programs and their assessments. Providing an up-to-date email and snail mail address is optional. If you do provide them, we will use them to contact you in future but we will not use them for random advertising purposes or give them to anyone for funding raising, etc.

1. Your Details
Name: 
Best email at which to contact you (optional): 
Current address (optional): 

Program Information

2. Which of the following degrees did you receive from Auburn?

- MA (masters degree awarded on the production of a thesis).
- MANT (non-thesis masters awarded to Ph.D. students after prelims).

3. In what year and semester did you earn that degree?

- Before Fall 2011
- Fall 2011
- Spring 2012
- Summer 2012
- Fall 2012
- Spring 2013
- Summer 2013
Fall 2013
• Spring 2014
• Summer 2014

4. Did you complete a graduate certificate at Auburn? If so, which one(s)? Select all that apply.
☐ Certificate in Archival Studies
☐ Certificate in Public History
☐ Certificate in College/University Teaching (Biggio Center)
☐ I did not receive a Graduate Certificate

Your work history since graduation

Please let us know where you are currently employed as well as your work history since completing your degree at Auburn. The more information you can provide the better. Fields that do not apply to your situation can be left blank.

5. What is your current occupation?
• I am employed in a professional capacity
• I am continuing in graduate education at Auburn
• I am continuing in graduate education at another institution
• Other (please specify)

6. If you clicked "I am employed in a professional capacity," what is your current occupation? (otherwise leave your answers to this question blank).

Organization: ____________________________________________
Job title: _______________________________________________
Month and Year when you started this position: ________________
Previous positions held *since* completing your graduate
studies at Auburn - list in order starting with the most recent (place approximate date ranges within brackets after each job):

7. If you are currently in a degree program at Auburn or at another institution:
What degree are you seeking? (e.g. Ph.D.)
What subject are you studying (e.g. History)
In what year did you commence this degree program?

8. If you clicked 'other' in Question 5, please provide details as to your current situation and plans for the future.

Impact

9. What did you learn at Auburn?

Did your time at Auburn increase your level of historical knowledge? A good deal  A lot

Did you become more effective as a researcher over the course of your degree at Auburn? A good deal  A lot
**Did your training at Auburn make you a better communicator and/or presenter?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not much</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>A good deal</th>
<th>A lot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. How has the history program at Auburn impacted you professionally?

What aspect of your training at Auburn has helped you most since completing the program?

What aspect of your training at Auburn has been least helpful?

Any other comments?