Meeting of History Survey Faculty

October 14, 2016

Present: Ewing, St. Julien, Schmeller, Veraluz, Van Zant, and Williams

We began the meeting at 9 AM with a review of the common learning outcomes from the American History Surveys (2010, 2020, 2030, and 2700), and a discussion of what we emphasize in our own classes. Schmeller provided the Outcomes from 2010 for common reference.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Recognize and correctly identify persons, institutions, and events of importance in American history through the end of Reconstruction in 1877.

2. Discuss major themes in the development of American politics, society, and culture during this period.

3. Demonstrate an understanding of the global context of American history.

4. Apply historical perspective to contemporary issues.

5. Recognize and critically evaluate historical interpretations

6. Analyze documents in their historical context.

7. Construct well-written essays using basic academic writing conventions.

Schmeller raised the concern that he often does not give much coverage to Outcome 5. Williams shared that he infuses some historiography before starting a different section. This is mostly informally assessed. Van Zant shared that he focuses on 4-7, and is weaker on 1-2. Many of us were worried that they are often not getting enough factual content, but for several the focus on document analysis helps give more relevant factual content. St. Julien felt she leans on 1 and 2 pretty heavily as the mix of who she has in class, and she often feels like she doesn’t get to 6 and 7. Williams shared that he focuses on ideas and then builds off of those. Most people agreed that attempting to cover everything is not generally possible.

We then shifted the conversation about what we really want students to get out of the class. Is it thesis construction? Or is it ideally a mix of content, writing, and argumentation/thesis construction. St. Julien raised the concern that there is some disconnect with what students learned in the English composition sequence.

Action Item: We need to have a conversation with English Composition coordinator about what they are teaching and how we can better integrate that in our own classes and build off of it.

Schmeller asked what experience Williams had so far with the new lower-division African-American survey. Williams is using a mix of primary and secondary sources but with the same goals and outcomes as the 2010/2020 sequence. The narrower topic allows more of a focus on content, and he is able to hit most of the learning outcomes fairly regularly.

Ewing share that she teaches counter narrative, and works from there to get to the other pieces. She integrates more self-directed learning and regularly encourages students to use the internet to address gaps they may have in content, and then uses class time to focus on interpretation. She does feels like she sometimes misses opportunities for using more primary sources. Many of us agreed that there has to be a trade off in time for what can be covered.

We then shifted the conversation to assessment of the learning outcomes, and Williams made the suggestion that as we all have different strengths that at least for 2010 some common primary sources would help insure we are hitting some similarly key points. There was general agreement on this. Schmeller raised the issue of the common exam, and our past experience and rationale for it. There was not support for returning to the common exam, but the faculty who regularly teach 2010 should begin identifying some common primary sources to serve at least as the basis of the ePortfolio artifact.

Veraluz commented that he is trying to add more assessments and grades into his courses. The problem he regularly encounters is that students don’t know how to use sources, so he has shorter writing assessments based on primary sources. Problem is getting that transferred into the five page essay. Van Zant chimed in that his impression is that students most want his feedback on essay as opposed to multiple choice scores. As far as writing assessments most of us are doing shorter, or in class work on documents. A discussion followed about the longer essay/paper and the necessity of it as far as the ePortfolio submission. One suggestion was a kind of menu of themes or sources for students to write on for common assessment. We are all doing this already, but it needs to be regularized. Most of us have moved away from 5-6 pages papers.

St. Julien shared that she created a word bank of items that should be included in writing on a larger document. Ewing builds her essay work off of central questions, “What does it mean to be American? What does Freedom mean? How does the American Dream change?”

We have all largely shifted toward teaching through themes as it gives students a better opportunity to develop and then demonstrate critical thinking.

Some have stepped away from using multiple choice as an assessment. All that use multiple choice have a fairly common (largely poor) experience with results, but still feeling is that is best way to still assess reading of text. St. Julien (I think) shared that Watson and Stöllar both use Learning Curve it does work, but access remains a problem. Schmeller shared that the few students he has had that have used Learning Curve have also greatly improved their performance on multiple choice exams.

The meeting adjourned slightly after 10. Schmeller thanked everyone that was able to attend.