



UMass Amherst's Educational Effectiveness Plan (EEP) provides departments with an ongoing structure for conducting systematic inquiry into the effectiveness of their efforts to support student success. For the first phase of EEP, departments answered a series of prompts about their current educational effectiveness efforts, and their inquiry plans. Here we provide an edited version of this department's responses.

History EEP

Identify the evidence you currently use (beyond GPA) to determine that your undergraduates have achieved the objectives you have for them.

We look at students' performance on the Honors Thesis (for honors students). Students' performance in writing and speaking in Integrative Experience courses. And students' performance in writing and speaking in Junior Year Writing Seminars.

What changes has the department made in its undergraduate program(s) and offerings based on the results of the evidence described in the previous section, over the last few years?

The following is summarized from our most recent planning document, November 2017, which in turn drew on our AQAD review in 2016-17:

1. Revising the undergraduate curriculum to include: (a) A required introductory Historical Methods course that all new History majors will take during their first semester after declaring the major. (b) Clearly defined tracks of related courses for history majors interested in particular aspects or themes in history, or in specific career paths after the B.A. (c) Renumbering and renaming some courses to provide a clearer sense to majors and prospective majors of the range of topics and approaches in the department's offerings.
2. Improving advising by conducting focus groups of current majors to identify their perceptions of areas of improvement, working to improve faculty's skills at mentoring undergraduate majors, and expanding our current career and internship advising.
3. Working to recruit a more diverse body of undergraduate majors, in keeping with the diversity of peoples, places, and times that our curriculum offers.
4. Continuing to enhance the extracurricular aspects of our undergraduate experience: e.g., the History Club, Phi Alpha Theta (the national honors society) and its new undergraduate history journal, undergraduate research, Peer Mentoring, service learning activities, the Feinberg Family Distinguished Lecture Series, and other public events for which undergraduates are part of the intended audience.

Please describe the focus of your inquiry and explain why this inquiry is important to your department right now.

Our inquiry will focus on two principal areas: (1) Students' skills in the core areas of researching, including the ability to find, assess, and compare sources, the ability to construct a historical argument, and the ability to write clearly. These are central to what it means to think historically and are crucial in an age of "fake news" and other deliberate disinformation campaigns. (2) Correlations between the sequence in which students take courses and their overall performance in the major. Our curriculum is relatively unstructured at present; we are introducing a required Historical Methods course for new majors, and we would like to investigate whether this course, to be piloted in spring 2019, will have the perceptible effect on students' learning outcomes that we predict.

What evidence do you plan to use to inform your inquiry focus? And, what are your initial thoughts on how you will collect this information?

For area 1, core skills, we plan to examine a random sampling of students' work in their Junior Year Writing Seminar and Integrative Experience courses and compare them to our student learning outcomes. We may supplement this with student focus groups, and time and other resources permitting, we may survey our alumni about their perception of value. We have highly positive feedback from alumni who return to our career events, but they are not a random sample. For area 2, we plan to compare grades and performance on written assignments in upper-level history courses for two groups: those majors who took the Historical Methods course before it became a requirement and those who did not take it. We may supplement this with student surveys in upper-level history courses.

What are the Student Learning Objectives for your department or program(s)?

History, B.A.

- Build historical knowledge.
- Develop historical methods.
- Recognize the provisional nature of knowledge, the disciplinary preference for complexity, and the comfort with ambiguity that history require.
- Apply the range of skills it takes to decode the historical record because of its incomplete, complex, and contradictory nature.
- Create historical arguments and narratives.
- Use historical perspective as central to active citizenship.

Experiential Goals

- Take a career preparation course.
- Participate in an internship.
- Study abroad (resources permitting).

History, M.A.; History, Ph.D.

- Build historical knowledge.
- Develop historical methods.
- Recognize the provisional nature of knowledge, the disciplinary preference for complexity, and the comfort with ambiguity that history require.
- Apply the range of skills it takes to decode the historical record because of its incomplete, complex, and contradictory nature.
- Create historical arguments and narratives.
- Use historical perspective as central to active citizenship.
- Develop the ability to teach history to a diverse range of students.