

Disciplinary Communication in History

I. Educational objectives

The History Department considers effective writing both a critical means to learning in the discipline and a pedagogical goal for undergraduate majors. The department provides courses that help history majors become proficient at written communication and the conventions of the discipline. While the department places special emphasis on its capstone seminar (History 190-, 194-, and 196-series, see below), it is committed to developing student writing throughout its undergraduate curriculum.

Writing

1. Students formulate historical questions and hypotheses through the analysis of primary and secondary sources.
2. Students evaluate, revise, and articulate hypotheses and conclusions.
3. Students learn the conventions of historical exposition, including forms of argumentation, style, standards of evidence, and citation.

Speaking/presentation

The History Department does not have a formal speaking or writing requirement, but many of the department's courses expect students to grapple with historical material in course discussions. Moreover, all of the department's capstone courses (where the vast majority of majors fulfill their "W" requirement) are run as seminars with low student to faculty ratios. Students in these seminars are required to evaluate historical evidence and writing and to present their own writing projects to the rest of the seminar.

Other

1. Students evaluate primary and secondary texts and other historical sources.
2. Students learn to synthesize arguments.

II. How the educational objectives are met in the curriculum

List of course(s) committed to disciplinary communications objectives

All History majors complete a "Comprehensive requirement," which may be satisfied in two ways:

- A. Senior Seminar (History 190-series, 194-series, or 196-series).
- B. Senior Thesis (History 195A and 195B).

Both the senior seminars and the senior thesis (History 195B) fulfill the “W” requirement. In each case, the “senior” designation is a misnomer, since students with sufficient preparation may complete these courses prior to their final year.

How each course contributes to the objectives

Both of the comprehensive requirement pathways (senior seminars and thesis) address the History Department’s disciplinary communication objectives. The small number of students (roughly 3-5% of graduating seniors) who write a thesis are not required to discuss or present their work in a seminar setting. However, they discuss their work with their thesis adviser and sometimes present their findings in the History Department’s undergraduate research symposium. In practice, many thesis writers also have completed senior seminars.

Writing

1. Senior seminars require total student writing of 25 pages or more. All seminars require students to complete shorter assignments and drafts. Instructors provide editorial, content, and stylistic feedback on students’ writing.
2. Some senior seminars assign a long research paper that is due at the end of the quarter, with a proposal and drafts due prior to the final essay. Others use shorter writing assignments spaced over the quarter. In either case, writing assignments and instructor feedback occur throughout the course.
3. In addition to feedback on writing, the capstone courses provide students with model papers and devote substantial class (or, in the case of senior theses, individual meetings) to disciplinary conventions of historical exposition, including argumentation, style, standards of evidence, and citation.

Speaking/presentation

Currently, public speaking and presentations have not been formal requirements of the senior seminar, but in practice students are required to evaluate historical evidence and writing and to present their own writing projects to the rest of the seminar.

Typically, a student gives two formal presentations per seminar (one to discuss the research proposal and a second to present findings). Students sometimes buttress their presentation with images and other forms of media. Instructors model the conventions of public speaking and presentation throughout the quarter.