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TUNING
The History Discipline
In U.S. Higher Education

The American Historical Association's Tuning project is a faculty-led, multi-year project designed to clarify the knowledge, understanding, and skills we intend students to develop in a history program or major.

Imagine the first faculty meeting of an academic year in which no one talked about budgets, course assignments, or parking spaces. What if we discussed 2 questions?

What are the disciplinary ideals that link us as historians?

How might we best introduce those to our students?

A discussion like that is the heart of the Tuning process.

What if we think of our major not in terms of minimal GPAs or credit hours or course sequences? What is the learning behind our programs? How clearly do we define the intended learning? And to whom do we describe our intentions?

That might sound like an exercise in "assessment." In fact, it is but carried out in a strikingly different fashion. In Tuning—unlike other work tied to departmental reviews, curriculum reform, and accreditation reports—

- The project is faculty-led
- The discussion is discipline-specific
- The AHA's Discipline Core statement provides initial reference points
- The conversation considers an institution's distinct mission, resources, and goals
- We work with colleagues at other institutions
- We consult a wide range of 'stakeholders' (including students, alumni, employers, policymakers)
- Historians make their implicit assumptions about the discipline explicit through clear, transparent statements

Tuning brings faculty together to clarify:
- the knowledge and proficiencies our discipline enhances
- the courses and exercises that directly address our learning goals
- the intentional, sequenced pathways through our program of study
- the discipline-based and transferable skills our students develop
- the educational and career tracks our graduates follow
- the contributions our faculty bring to General Education as well as the major
10 Suggestions for starting work on the AHA Tuning project

1. Begin where people are, not where you want them to be. Expect confusion, questions, skepticism, and objections.
2. Don't go it alone. Borrow from work that 150 US Tuning colleagues have done. Look at the Tuning work of colleagues in the EU and other regions since 2000.
3. Clarify the concerns, problems, and aspirations of your campus. The AHA realizes that the "discipline core" we have developed will be revised, taken apart, added to, or winnowed down to reflect the distinct character of each institution and its students.
4. Build the project incrementally. Start with a discussion of provisional "learning outcomes" for your program. Ask faculty to place "learning outcomes" for their courses prominently on the first page of their syllabi. Experiment with evaluative "rubrics" that can help students see how course exercises focus on and develop the learning goals we've stated. Determine (and map out) which courses in your program provide those "outcomes."
5. Work with your institution's General Education committee to integrate history survey courses more closely into the sequence, design, and purposes of that program.
6. Talk with a wide range of "stakeholders." Engage with students, alumni, parents, policymakers, and employers about the knowledge, understanding, and skills that historical study fosters.
7. Test different ways of monitoring student learning. E.g., rubrics; e-portfolios; assignments tied to learning outcomes; customizing course evaluation forms; exploring assessment features of a course management system (such as Moodle, Blackboard, Canvas).
8. Meet with academic advisors, career counselors, campus orientation directors, and librarians. Share with them the ways in which historians frame our disciplinary goals.
9. Help students build a compelling, persuasive narrative of their educational experience. Help clarify for them the skills, proficiencies, and abilities historical study develops. This provides students with suggestions for a key interview question: "What can you do with what you know?"
10. Prepare a Tuning "elevator speech." Here's an example.

From “My Course” to “Our Curriculum”

Historians involved in Tuning have developed priorities that reflect a range of experiences and needs:

- Revising a major's structure or requirements
- Curriculum mapping (laying out how students move through a major and seeing where they acquire knowledge and skills)
- Working on an introductory or methodology course for majors
- Involving contingent faculty members in meaningful, ongoing discussions of learning goals and instructional methods
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- Working on a capstone seminar or expanding undergraduate research opportunities
- Addressing online courses and how they work with the rest of the unit’s curriculum
- Drawing on resources around campus to improve student writing
- Sharing and offering feedback on each other’s assignments in a workshop
- Reaching out to students and/or alumni for feedback on the program
- Consulting other stakeholders across campus and in the community to improve communication about the value of history learning
- Tying the discipline-specific work of Tuning into larger institutional mission or general education outcomes on a particular campus
- Promoting the history major to students and potential students
- Deepening professional connections with allies in the campus and local community
- Collecting data and mapping the career pathways of their program graduates, then sharing this information with prospective majors as well as academic advising staff and campus career centers

“The AHA’s Tuning project asks historians to clarify—and demystify—the core goals and the key skills pursued in our discipline. We want to answer a basic question: when students complete a program in history, what should they know, understand, and be able to do? We want our students to understand clearly what they take from their studies into employment, further education, and civic life."

Lumina Foundation

As the first phases of the AHA’s project, begun in 2012 with a grant from Lumina Foundation, conclude, the AHA and project participants are developing ways to spread the ideas and lessons of Tuning broadly among college and university historians.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, INCLUDING THE HISTORY DISCIPLINE CORE STATEMENT, VISIT: www.historians.org/tuning
History is a set of evolving rules and tools that allows us to interpret the past with clarity, rigor, and an appreciation for interpretative debate. It requires evidence, sophisticated use of information, and a deliberative stance to explain change and continuity over time. As a profoundly public pursuit, history is essential to active and empathetic citizenship and requires effective communication to make the past accessible to multiple audiences. As a discipline, history entails a set of professional ethics and standards that demand peer review, citation, and toleration for the provisional nature of knowledge.
Core Competencies (Numbers) and Learning Outcomes (Bullets)

HISTORY STUDENTS CAN:

1. Engage in historical inquiry, research, and analysis.
   • Develop a disciplined, skeptical stance and outlook on the world that demands evidence and sophisticated use of information.
   • Understand the dynamics of change over time.
   • Explore the complexity of the human experience, across time and space.
   • Evaluate a variety of historical sources for their credibility, position, and perspective.
   • Read and contextualize materials from the past with appropriate precision and detail.
Core Competencies (Numbers) and Learning Outcomes (Bullets)

HISTORY STUDENTS CAN:

2. Practice historical empathy.

• Value the study of the past for its contribution to lifelong learning and critical habits of mind that are essential for effective and engaged citizenship.

• Develop a body of historical knowledge with range and depth.

• Recognize the ongoing provisional nature of knowledge.

• Interpret the past in context; contextualize the past on its own terms.

• Explore multiple historical and theoretical viewpoints that provide perspective on the past.

• Recognize where they are in history.
Core Competencies (Numbers) and Learning Outcomes (Bullets)

HISTORY STUDENTS CAN:

3. Understand the complex nature of the historical record.

• Distinguish between primary and secondary materials and decide when to use each.

• Choose among multiple tools, methods, and perspectives to investigate and interpret materials from the past.

• Recognize the value of conflicting narratives and evidence.
Core Competencies (Numbers) and Learning Outcomes (Bullets)

HISTORY STUDENTS CAN:

4. Generate significant, open-ended questions about the past and devise research strategies to answer them.

- Seek a variety of sources that provide evidence to support an argument about the past.
- Develop a methodological practice of gathering, sifting, analyzing, ordering, synthesizing, and interpreting evidence.
- Identify and summarize other scholars’ historical arguments.
Core Competencies (Numbers) and Learning Outcomes (Bullets)

HISTORY STUDENTS CAN:

5. Craft historical narrative and argument.

• Generate a historical argument that is reasoned and based on historical evidence selected, arranged, and analyzed.

• Write effective narrative that describes and analyzes the past for its use in the present.

• Understand that the ethics and practice of history mean recognizing and building on other scholars’ work, peer review, and citation.

• Defend a position publicly and revise this position when new evidence requires it.
Core Competencies (Numbers) and Learning Outcomes (Bullets)

HISTORY STUDENTS CAN:

6. Practice historical thinking as central to engaged citizenship.

• Engage a diversity of viewpoints in a civil and constructive fashion.
• Work cooperatively with others to develop positions that reflect deliberation and differing perspectives.
• Apply historical knowledge and analysis to contribute to contemporary social dialogue.
Assessment Forum, Perspectives on History, January 2015

• Anne Hyde (Colorado College), Confessions from the Field: Building Assessments with the History Discipline Core

• Jonathan Chu (Univ. of Massachusetts Boston), The Benefits of Self-Assessment: Measuring Historical Thinking Skills at UMass Boston

• John Buchkoski, Mikal B. Eckstrom, Holly Kizewski, and Courtney Pixler (Univ. of Nebraska-Lincoln), Creating and Administering a Primary Source Analysis

• Josh Ashenmiller (Fullerton College), SLO Curve Ball: What I Really Want for My Students
• Anne Hyde (now at Univ. of Oklahoma), Five Reasons History Professors Suck at Assessment
• Gary Kroll, Jessamyn Neuhaus, and Wendy Gordon (SUNY Plattsburgh), Slouching toward Student-Centered Assessment
• Jeffrey McClurken and Krystyn Moon (Univ. of Mary Washington), Making Assessment Work for You
• James Grossman and Julia Brookins (American Historical Association), Assessment Is What We Make of It
Special Tuning Issue,  
*The History Teacher* (August 2016)

- Daniel J. McInerney (Utah State Univ.), “The American Historical Association's Tuning Project: An Introduction”
- Sarah Shurts (Bergen Comm. Coll.), “History in Harmony: The AHA 'Tuning' Project in the Community College and the Closing of the Transfer Gap”
- Nancy Quam-Wickham (CSU Long Beach), “Reimagining the Introductory U.S. History Course”
- Elaine Carey and Tracey-Anne Cooper (St. John’s Univ.), “Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered: Our Experiences with Assessment and the Tuning Project”
- Andrew Stuart Bergerson and Nathan Lindsay, with Leah K. Gensheimer and Dan Stroud (Missouri-Kansas City), “Sharper, Clearer Outcomes: Using Stakeholder Focus Groups for Tuning History”
- Susan Eckelmann, Sara C. Jorgensen, and Kira Robison (Tennessee at Chattanooga), “From Data Beast to Beast of Burden: A Case Study of Learning Outcomes in Faculty-Led Assessment as a Tool for Undergraduate History Curriculum Design”
HISTORY

Essential Concepts

Students of history should understand...

History: History is an interpretative account of the past supported by evidence that survives. History is not simply an account of “what happened”; the past cannot be known except through a disciplined process of problem solving.

The Past: The object of historical study is the past. Recognizing the “pastness of the past” directs historians to understand people of the past by contextualizing their actions: what they were trying to accomplish, the nature of their beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge, the culturally and historically situated assumptions that guided thought and action.

Historical Evidence: Historians use primary and secondary sources to make sense of the past. History students should know that primary and secondary sources come in diverse forms, represent diverse perspectives, and have distinct strengths and limitations as evidence about the past.

Complex Causality: Historians are intensely interested in the how and why of historical events. Historical accounts are multiple and layered, avoiding monicausal explanations and reductionist thinking.

Significance: Significance is the indefinite standard by which historians determine what questions are worth asking, what parts of the past are worth teaching, learning, and remembering; and which pieces of the extant past properly belong in a meaningful, coherent account.

Essential Competencies

Students of history should be able to...

Evaluate Historical Accounts: Recognize historical explanations in their most common forms: narrative, exposition, causal model, and analogy; identify an author’s interpretation and critically scrutinize the evidence and analysis used to support it; and critically evaluate, compare, and synthesize historical accounts.

Interpret Primary Sources: Distinguish primary from secondary sources; assess the credibility of sources and make judgments about their usefulness and limitations as evidence about the past; consider how the historical context in which information was originally created, accessed, and distributed affects its message; and address questions of genre, content, audience, perspective, and purpose to generate subtexts that illuminate the intentions of the author.

Apply chronological reasoning: Take account of the role of time, sequencing, and periodization in historical narratives. Contextualize: Place an event, actor, or primary source within the context of its time in order to interpret its meaning and significance.

Construct a historical argument using primary sources: Construct acceptable historical accounts that interpret the past using primary sources as evidence for knowledge claims in ways that demonstrate understanding of historical concepts, especially the nature of historical evidence, interpretation, and perspective.
Another reason these issues matter to the AHA: declining majors and enrollments

From 2013 to 2014, the number of people earning a Bachelor’s Degree in History declined by 9.1%. Source: National Center for Education Statistics

Fig. 1: History Bachelor’s Degrees by Institution Type
WHAT'S WORKED:
5 Ways to Connect with Faculty on Teaching, Learning, and Assessment

Dan McInerney
Professor & Associate Dept. Head, History
Utah State University
1. BEGIN WHERE PEOPLE ARE, NOT WHERE YOU WANT THEM TO BE

faculty passionate about their courses

passionate about student success

passionate about their disciplines
2. RECOGNIZE DISCIPLINARY SOCIETIES AS A VALUABLE RESOURCE
3. COMMUNICATE CLEARLY – TO GENERALISTS, NOT SPECIALISTS

MOST FACULTY DON’T HOLD GRADUATE DEGREES FROM COLLEGES OF EDUCATION

THE VOCABULARY OF ASSESSMENT: OFTEN HEARD AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

AVOID JARGON AND ACRONYMS

FACULTY WHO’VE BEEN BURNED BY TOP-DOWN, ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL, ADD-ON ASSESSMENT PROJECTS IN THE PAST
4. CLARIFY FACULTY’S MULTIPLE ROLES

the shift from “my course” to “our curriculum”
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| course | curriculum | program |
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the shift from “my course” to “our curriculum”
5. CLARIFY THE LINKS BETWEEN EVALUATIONS OF STUDENT WORK AND MEANINGFUL ASSESSMENT

POINT 1: FACULTY-CENTERED ASSESSMENT
“returns assessment to the faculty, relying on work done in the regular contexts of teaching and learning rather than turning to ‘add on’ instruments and approaches that are externally developed and administered.”

Pat Hutchings
“assessment is ongoing and decentralized.

It occurs every time a faculty member examines a particular student response to an exam, demonstration, or assignment.”

“Assessment is happening all the time” and “requires a comprehensive record-keeping system.”

Peter Ewell
preparing students to tackle nonstandard, unscripted problems and questions. . . where “right answers” are not known and where the nature of the problem itself is likely uncertain at best, and often actively contested.

College must prepare learners to deal with the complex and uncertain, not just with the rote and routine.
5. CLARIFY THE LINKS BETWEEN EVALUATIONS OF STUDENT WORK AND MEANINGFUL ASSESSMENT

POINT 1: FACULTY-CENTERED ASSESSMENT

POINT 2: USING COURSE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS TO ASSIST ASSESSMENT
LEARNING MASTERY

- faculty state the **core learning outcomes** of a course (key: learning outcomes aligned with established disciplinary / curricular / or program outcomes)
- instructor creates **evaluative rubrics** for course exercises focused on stated outcomes (clarify components of a “grade”)
- student work submitted (and evaluated) electronically
- **Canvas** creates graphic imagery of the results
  - grades as conventional numbers and letters AND
  - rubric results that display progress on key learning outcomes
- Canvas creates graphic imagery of the results
1. BEGIN WHERE PEOPLE ARE, NOT WHERE YOU WANT THEM TO BE

2. RECOGNIZE DISCIPLINARY SOCIETIES AS A VALUABLE RESOURCE

3. COMMUNICATE CLEARLY – TO GENERALISTS, NOT SPECIALISTS

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