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Measuring Classroom Learning [1]

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Each fall I teach a course I created some years ago in the History Department at UCCS: “Theory and Methods of History.” Recently it has been given the number “History 480.” Our department agreed to reserve all classes numbered History 480 to History 498 for special writing-intensive courses that would serve as preparation for senior thesis, based on the model I created originally in Theory and Methods in History. All courses in this number range are to have particular lengthy research paper assignments that provide a sort of model for the student’s later (or ongoing) senior thesis project. In this way, we hope to respond to persistent student complaints that they have “never done” a project like a senior thesis paper, as well as to address disparities between incoming transfer and junior college students versus students who begin their UCCS program with us and remain for four years.

A few years ago I began experimenting with “formative” as well as “summative” assessment questions in this course. For my Presidential Teaching Scholars project, I plan to revive this program of assessing learning in History 480 as well as History 499 (Senior Thesis in History), with both formative and summative questions designed to systemize findings on what is, and is not, learned in these classes.

History 480 begins with a very specific set of library exercises designed to familiarize students with all manner of indexes, guides, and bibliographies in history (i.e., force them to go the library and actually pick up books). That is an initial, “introductory” course exercise. Later, towards the end of semester, a follow-up exercise assigns students difficult historical questions, asks them to research those questions, and then write up a report which discusses not only what the students found, but also how they went about finding it. In addition to grading these exercises, I will also give them assessment scores based on the table below:

INSTRUCTOR ASSESSMENT RUBRIC: Scored on a scale of 1-10

Poor: ___
Fair: ___
Good: ___
Excellent: ___

Demonstrates competence in using library resources efficiently: ___
Shows skill in researching difficult questions: ___
Knows how to apply historical theories to specific research questions: ___
Understands how to test and explore historical hypotheses: ___

Putting the two exercises together provides a good picture of the research and interpretive skills of individual students. Question four comes from an exercise on exploring the evolution of the “frontier thesis’ model of understanding American history. Students read a famous essay of Frederick Jackson Turner, explore challenges to his theories, and then explore the frontier thesis model using specific situations in the past to test the model. In my two sections of History 499, a similar rubric and exercise can be applied to specific research projects given out in that class.

Groups audience:
President's Teaching Scholars Program

Source URL:https://www.cu.edu/ptsp/measuring-classroom-learning

Links
[1] https://www.cu.edu/ptsp/measuring-classroom-learning