

## Seven "Learning Outcomes" for the Department of History (adopted May 2009)

### HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE

#### 1. (Range of historical information)

Pursue coursework that examines a broad range of historical experience through:

- surveys of pre-modern, modern, and U.S. history, as well as
- upper-division classes that provide greater focus and analytical rigor in specific subject areas,
- leading up to a capstone course focused on the construction of a senior thesis.

The coursework explores: how change occurs over time; the complex issue of historical causation; the influence of political ideologies, economic structures, social organization, cultural perceptions, and natural environments on historical events; and the ways in which factors such as race, gender, class, ethnicity, region, and religion create "histories" rather than a monolithic past.

### HISTORICAL THINKING

#### 2. (Recognize the past-ness of the past)

The ability to understand how people have existed, acted, and thought in the always-different context of the past. History often involves encountering and sensing the past's otherness and of learning to understand unfamiliar structures, cultures and belief systems. These forms of understanding also shed important light on the influence which the past has on the present.

#### 3. (Emphasize the *complex* nature of past experience)

The appreciation of the complexity and diversity of situations, events and past mentalities. This emphasis is central to history's character as an anti-reductionist discipline fostering intellectual maturity.

#### 4. (Emphasize the complex and problematic nature of the historical record)

The understanding of the problems inherent in the historical record itself:

- awareness of a range of viewpoints; appreciation of the range of problems involved in the interpretation of complex, ambiguous, conflicting and often incomplete material; a feeling for the limitations of knowledge and the dangers of simplistic explanations.

### HISTORICAL SKILLS

#### 5. (Develop skills in critical thinking and reading)

*Critical thinking:* a recognition that statements are not all of equal validity, that there are ways of testing them, and that historians operate by rules of evidence which, though themselves subject to critical evaluation, are also a component of intellectual integrity and maturity.

*Critical reading:* The ability to read and analyze texts and other primary sources, both critically and empathetically, while addressing questions of genre, content, perspective and purpose. Primary sources include visual and material sources like topographical evidence, paintings, coins, medals, cartoons, photographs and films.

#### 6. (Develop research skills)

Intellectual independence: a history program is not simply or even primarily a preparation for research in the subject, but it *should* incorporate the general skills of the researcher, namely the ability to set tasks and solve problems. This involves:

- bibliographic skills; the ability to gather, sift, select, organize and synthesize large quantities of evidence; the ability to formulate appropriate questions and to provide answers to them using valid and relevant evidence and argument. It should develop reflexivity, i.e. an understanding of the nature of the discipline including what questions are asked by historians, and why.

#### 7. (Develop the ability to construct reasonable historical arguments)

In written and oral form, drawing on and presenting all the above skills. Such argument should have structure; it should be relevant and concise. In the case of written argument it should be expressed in clear, lucid and coherent prose. Orally, it should involve the capacity to sustain a reasoned line of argument in the face of others, to listen, to engage in sustained debate, and amend views as necessary in the light of evidence and argument.