

**The History Major and Undergraduate Liberal Education:  
Report of the National History Center Working Group to the Teagle Foundation**

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9-29-08**

**1. Working Group Narrative Report**

This report responds to a request from the Teagle Foundation to individual disciplines to “reassess the relationship between the goals and objectives of undergraduate concentrations in their discipline and those of liberal education.” We recognize that all disciplines and fields have something important to contribute to liberal learning. History, however, provides something distinctive. This contribution can be enhanced by a more explicit understanding of the relationship between the history major and the broader goals and processes of liberal learning, and through consideration of that relationship in discussions about the curriculum.

We will use the Association of American Colleges & Universities definition of liberal education (which we refer to as “liberal learning”): “a philosophy of education that empowers individuals with broad knowledge and transferable skills, and a strong sense of value, ethics, and civic engagement. [Liberal learning is] characterized by challenging encounters with important issues, and more a way of studying than a specific course or field of study.” Framed only slightly differently, liberal learning is a broad and interactive approach to undergraduate education that prepares students for a future of active and responsible democratic citizenship, and for fulfilling lives, including an appetite for lifelong learning.

History as a subject stands as the *domain* of the major; this report is intended to help us reflect on our *objectives*, our educational goals. How does the study of history contribute to liberal learning as a basis for a lifelong engagement with ideas and civic culture? We begin by stressing that the goal of undergraduate history teaching is not to train undergraduate students to be historians—it is to nurture their liberal and civic capacities, in part by integrating disciplinary knowledge, methods, and principles into the broad experience of undergraduate education.

**Historical content:**

All humanities disciplines explore aspects of the past and its meaning. History stands out as the study of the past itself, an attempt to understand differences associated with temporality and to explain and conceptualize change over time based on evidence that survives. History is not, to cite the example given by the famous French historian Marc Bloch, simply the reporting of events (or, phrased less felicitously but more famously by Henry Ford, “one damned thing after another”). History education begins with a student learning that without analysis, explanation or interpretation, knowledge of the past is not yet history. In teaching history we do much more than simply tell students “the way things were.” We introduce them to divergent historical interpretations and primary sources and teach them a set of methods for attempting to explain and understand no matter what kind of evidence is placed in front of them. The underlying skill is a double one: the capacity to sift through masses of information and determine what matters, and a capacity for closely reading various texts. Each of these is crucial in contemporary society, where anyone with internet access and a bit of curiosity is likely to confront information overload.

The study of history and the appreciation it brings of the differentness of the past, also offers students important perspective on their own identity and on the present. History requires us to think outside of our own experience in time and place, and thus fosters empathetic thinking, greater appreciation of diversity, and understanding of the relationship between context and judgment. Furthermore, it offers perspective on the present, helping to situate it in a longer stream of time and complicate simplistic understandings of present issues. Historical perspective stimulates more nuanced and often critical approach to cause and effect, and conventional wisdoms generated by “natural” categories we have inherited from the past.

What the discipline of history has to offer goes far beyond the “historical turn” in other disciplines, which usually means little more than longitudinal perspective. History is a mode of analysis of contingency—it is not inevitable that we are what we are; or, where we are. Nor even that we were what we were or where we were. Neither stasis nor change can be taken for granted, and both emanate from both process and agency. History is about taking advantage of and making sense of an open-ended world of evidence, which assists the historically-educated in living on the edge of open possibilities. What could be more important in the twenty-first century?

Historians’ disagreements about the past are matched by their diverse perspectives on the proper scope of the major curriculum. The traditional view emphasized coverage (that is, breadth over depth) and organized historical knowledge according to space and time—which usually meant by geography, national or political boundaries, and chronological period. More recently, however, historians have begun to favor in-depth analysis, have moved to transnational or thematic categories, and have begun to explore the

possibilities for “world history”—which among other things has challenged the privileging of western (and especially American) history in the undergraduate curriculum. The relation between depth and breadth has been recalibrated in a way that enriches the discipline.

Happily, we are finding that enrollment in non-western survey courses is frequently greater than that in U.S. and European history, indicating that history is educating for a global experience and cosmopolitanism in a way that most other disciplines are not, enhancing one of the most important goals of liberal learning.

History has always been a culturally pluralistic discipline. Almost every history major is required to study more than one geographical area of the world and more than one chronological era. An emphasis on globalization has added to all of this the awareness of linkages and interrelationships across historical time and place. These changes have nourished a healthy inclination towards problem-orientation in the organization of courses and teaching categories. But we do seem to be moving somewhat from the classic methodological categories (political history, economic history, social history, intellectual history) to categories of people and places (African-American history, rural history, urban history, gender history, etc.). This has the great advantage of orienting history as a field more closely to the interests of students (and, for that matter, faculty) and to the more obvious aspects of human experience, but some members of the Working Group worried that it might also risk the loss of a synthetic understanding of the past. It is possible that current formal subject matter categories, whether demographic or spatial, nurture a tendency to study ourselves as historical subjects. But one of the great virtues of historical thinking, especially as part of the wider enterprise of liberal learning, is the analytical imperative to step outside oneself.

History's disciplinary inclination to distance us from our own experience and sensibilities and to engage the differentness of other people, places, and especially times, requires students to approach information and important questions in much the same way we hope they will approach civic life. It is about problem solving within a context, about gathering evidence from likely and unlikely sources, about how evidence from different sources fits together to make a picture of what happened or did not happen. It is about understanding that what happened might be viewed differently depending on whose viewpoint we are taking. It requires determination of how causes interrelate with one another, rather than a search for a single causal factor. Historians monitor how individual efforts add up to a whole. They consider how the resistance of those who are not necessarily empowered nonetheless can change the course of affairs—as well as about the dynamics of power itself. Unlike almost all other disciplines, history is a catholic field in which methodologies are chosen to solve problems (rather than problems being selected to test methodologies). History is thus inherently (though not necessarily for any individual historian) a multidisciplinary field and one in which inquiry begins with the problem and the historical context, not the discipline or dominant theory. In this regard, it is akin to the challenges of citizenship.

**Historical skills:**

What about historical skills apart from content? The first need is to distinguish disciplinary skills from more general liberal learning skills (critical thinking, clarity of expression in speaking and writing, reading comprehension, quantitative literacy, the ability to organize facts and ideas, argumentation, and the like), and perhaps also from

related field skills in the humanities and social sciences. These related fields include those in which students study the past, but are different from history as a discipline. We note that we are especially interested in history's contribution to what William James, in his essay on "The Responsibility of the College Bred" called the virtues of "discrimination" (what these days would probably be termed "judgment"): the capacity to sift through information, to distinguish between the serious and the unserious, knowledge and myth, right and wrong. This is the highest order of the liberal learning skills and it lies at the heart of historical work.

History undergraduate courses are rarely dominated by discussions of theory and methodology. Instead historians allocate more class time to an exploration of what happened in the past, how we know that it happened, and how that knowledge varies as observers' viewpoints shift. Historical study requires refined skills that enable us to solve problems by discovering information and evaluating written or material evidence to create order out of disorder. History is, in addition, a field mostly committed to the narrative form—it is the study of change over time (including individual agency, institutions, social structure, path-dependency, and contingency), necessitating longitudinal analysis and generally organizing events and ideas along a timeline and through story-telling of some kind. It therefore requires distinctive forms of literary expression, although there is also a strong analytic tradition that eschews narrative as the privileged form of historical discourse.

History also places a premium on the capacity for synthesis, which is how historians ordinarily make sense out of disparate patterns of evidence. It combines close examination and analysis of evidence with largeness of context and scope. Hence a history

major offers the inquiring student the opportunity to bring together the several disciplines that s/he has studied in order to address historical questions. History values and rewards foreign language competency, since students benefit from the opportunity to explore texts in their original languages. But history also rewards quantitative analysis (an area in which our training is often lacking) and the capacity to work with non-verbal data (image, sound, material culture). Above all, the study of history teaches a holistic approach to understanding that distinguishes it, in particular, from other social sciences.

**History and liberal learning:**

These attributes of history as a field of undergraduate study render it especially pertinent to liberal learning. Indeed, the turn to broadly based social history in the last generation means that history as it is now frequently taught touches almost every aspect of life and draws on materials from many disciplines. History is inherently the study of how societies are constituted, and how people conduct themselves in society, always in a chronological perspective—and recognizing that these things change over time.

If history is taught well, our students will understand these processes in part by reference to their own life experiences, while at the same time learning the importance of placing any life experience in the context of time and place, and recognizing the multiple perspectives present in any social situation. Ideally, they will bring their capacity for historical understanding to bear on the lives they are leading and the societies in which they live, a goal that suggests the desirability of complementing our emphasis on globalism with an orientation towards the local as well. History also teaches and facilitates empathetic skills, in that understanding an event requires trying to stand in the shoes of various

historical actors, a practice that exercises and extends the social imagination. To the extent that our students are required to discuss, write, get feedback on their writing, analyze and synthesize in papers and examinations, and work with scholars through difficult problems in classes and assignments, we are training them in the life skills of liberal learning and the educated citizen, and a citizen practiced in the elements of life long learning.

It may well be, however, that many history teachers are not sufficiently aware of this feedback process, and thus are insufficiently reflective about how history bears upon their students' capacity for citizenship and civic engagement. This report therefore recommends that we understand this process better, and apply it self-consciously in history teacher education and training. We need to ask not only how history contributes to liberal learning, but also how ideas about liberal learning should affect the history major. To the extent that liberal learning moves a student from content to cognition, history can play a useful and perhaps major role in liberal learning. The field of cognitive psychology has made it clear that the most effective learning at any stage of education is active learning, and for some time historians have oriented their teaching to the cognitive process, stressing the student's acquisition of "historical understanding" or "habits of historical thinking" through active learning, rather than merely reproducing facts or descriptive formulae. It is not enough, for example, to understand and remember a body of historical evidence; the student must learn to use that evidence to construct a historical argument. This direct contribution to liberal learning needs to be broadened and deepened within the history major.

### **History and broader learning outcomes:**

The single most important contribution that training in history can make to the liberal learning of undergraduates is to help students to contextualize knowledge, offering an antidote to naïve presentism. Few historians would be so instrumentalist as to suggest that those who do not remember history are condemned to repeat it. But most would agree that the historically uninformed citizen would be severely hampered in making sound judgments about current events and future policies. This pertains without respect to the particular historical narratives the student (or former student) is most familiar with, since she should have derived from a sound historical education a general method for situating the evaluation of behavior (and by extension herself) in time and place.

It is tempting to argue that the study of history prepares students to make better ethical judgments and inculcates in them a heightened sense of social and political responsibility. This will doubtless be true of some approaches to history and the teaching of history, especially in their emphasis on empathetic skills and on the question of how context in the past affects judgment in the present, a crucial concept in any discussion of moral relativism. It seems likely, however, that the possibilities for historians to produce such learning are no better than those for teachers in other fields of the humanities and social sciences—though the historian’s emphasis on the posing of questions does often stimulate the articulation of moral and ethical issues on the part of students. We have come a long way, thankfully, from the times at which historians were expected to teach specific moral lessons (Christian history, Whig history), and no responsible scholar wants to retrace those steps today. Still, for the talented and committed history teacher, the opportunity to engage undergraduates thoughtfully with ethical and political dilemmas is available, appealing, and feasible.

Learning history involves the cultivation of students' capacities for making judgments about historical ideas, events, and actors. This capacity should carry over to their judgments about contemporary life. Like other disciplines, history has its own standards and ethical codes, and history major curricula that include some engagement with issues of judgment are more likely to generate thinking about the ways in which such codes affect practice. This is undoubtedly an area of concern that deserves greater attention from history teachers than it has received in the past.

**The college history teacher:**

If we are to rethink history education in the context of liberal learning, what does that tell us about the role of the teacher? First, postsecondary history faculty should be better trained to achieve the cognitive and civic goals of undergraduate teaching generally, and in modes of training for historical understanding specifically. The American Historical Association recently surveyed history doctoral programs, and the results of that survey make clear that graduate history faculty are not meeting their responsibility to prepare their students for careers as teachers. This problem exists throughout the humanities and social sciences. The larger challenge is one of recommitting postsecondary faculty to their teaching mission, although it is likely that this need is greatest in the research universities and least in the liberal arts colleges. But the problem is general in that Ph.D. students generally are socialized to focus on disciplinary development and research, which are only partial aspects of the profession. Teaching in classrooms and beyond them is also part of professionalism in history, as is an understanding of the scholarship of teaching and

learning. That is where history most powerfully does the work of promoting the broader aims of liberal learning.

Generalizations about teaching and learning across the vast and diverse institutional expanse of American higher education require considerable qualification. Neither our observations nor our recommendations, therefore, will apply uniformly across the national landscape of history departments. In general however, history teachers can and should train their students in all of the competencies that the AAC&U specifies as core to liberal learning. Departments need to be sure that faculty members are sufficiently skilled to provide such instruction—and that they actually do so.

Some of this professional education could come from outside the department. For example, in those research universities where scholars outside the history department offer courses that relate to the process of learning, perhaps history graduate students ought to be encouraged to take such courses. The question is whether teaching as a profession can be a part of routine graduate education and acculturation. Even students who opt for public history careers will become educators.

We also need to consider how new Ph.D.s are, or are not, encouraged to think of themselves as members of a liberal arts faculty, rather than mostly a history department. Perhaps this is less an issue of graduate education than new faculty orientation, which is already taken most seriously at liberal arts colleges. This also will nudge into the tenure system. Currently a new faculty member can assume that tenure exists mostly within the context of the department; one's role as a member of a liberal arts faculty is virtually irrelevant. This is not simply an issue for the field of history, since colleges and universities

need to do far more to value participation in the liberal learning enterprise in the process of tenure and promotion.

Even more of our majors, especially those in public, comprehensive, universities, will become educators in precollegiate classrooms. In part because of requirements established by accrediting agencies and schools of education, these departments operate under significant constraints. The different needs of these majors can generate tensions between the imperatives of content and pedagogy, leaving little room in a crowded agenda for seemingly less practical abstractions. Yet the discourse of liberal education might offer a middle ground in that tension, a common terrain that can nurture historical learning and habits of mind necessary to good teaching at any level. And since many students moving towards a career in teaching will not remain in the classroom for their adult lives, a history major oriented as much towards liberal education as teacher education will stand them in good stead.

**Assessment:**

Perhaps the most challenging problem that confronts history as an approach to liberal learning is that of assessment. In higher education, assessment of history majors usually occurs in individual classrooms by history faculty who can design assessments to measure the particular content and skills goals of each course and/or in a capstone seminar or project. Faculty usually mix a variety of assessment tools, such as tests, essays, research papers, and presentations in order to measure student mastery of important historical skills and knowledge. We can even move beyond the individual course to measure how much “history” a student has learned, or at least absorbed over the course of the major. But we do

not know how best to assess the value of the major to the student's liberal education. With pressure from the federal government, foundations, state governments, and others to generate measures of effectiveness, we cannot ignore this imperative. The challenge is to design assessments that speak to our goals, that relate to the desired outcome of a liberal education.

In K–12 education, history assessment has often been viewed as a question of which “facts” and topics all students should learn. At times, epitomized by the ongoing controversy over national history standards, this discussion has become embroiled in political conflict over which subjects, interpretations, and overall narratives should be privileged and whether the national narrative should be celebratory or critical. To the extent that history faculty in universities desire to articulate knowledge that they believe should be common to all history majors, they will face similar debates over what content to require and measure. However it seems more likely, given disagreements among faculty over the desirability and feasibility of privileging particular historical content and the strong emphasis on historical thinking skills and methods in the collegiate study of history, that the chief issue for history assessment in higher education will be how to develop sophisticated methods of assessment that can assess learning outcomes without being so reductionist as to solely measure low order skills.

These assessment methods are likely to draw upon a set of existing tools, including portfolios, comparisons of student knowledge in gateway and capstone courses, and senior comprehensive examinations. But each of these constitutes, in a way, a *formative* assessment—a measure of progress during the process itself. *Summative* assessment—a measure of the effectiveness of the process, is likely to require exploration into the life

histories of our majors. If liberal education is, for example, the fostering of an attitude towards lifelong learning, we need to make it clear that assessment takes place long after our students walk off the stage with their diplomas.

Beginning with a strong definition of desired outcomes we can move towards meaningful assessment of what history a graduating major should know, and how that knowledge contributes to a liberal education. What matters in the latter context are the goals we share with other disciplines: critical thinking, problem solving, critical reading of all kinds of texts (written, numerical, visual), communications skills (writing and speaking), and global awareness. The basic historical skills transfer to a variety of occupations, but are important for all of us in the development of skills necessary for an enlightened citizenry. They are essential for the exercise of political life in a democracy. At the very least, for example, everyone needs to know how to evaluate a newspaper account, or a blog. Do we know how to assess these broader historical learning outcomes? It is clear that thinking about the history major as an aspect of liberal learning will help us in the construction of assessment tools that are not merely tests of content knowledge, but this is a journey upon which higher education has only begun to set out. The challenge for historians is to plot the course of our discipline in our participation in this journey. If we do not define the desired outcomes, participate in conversations about how to measure the major's relationship to those outcomes, and help to formulate the parameters of assessment, we will find our work assessed by people who do not completely understand that work. The liberal arts have value—the question is how to measure that value in general, and how to measure it in particular for an education that has history at its center?

**Conclusion:**

Our conversations with colleagues and our admittedly unsystematic surveys have pointed to considerable pride among historians in their participation in the enterprise of liberal education. This confidence in the centrality of our discipline to liberal learning is not unjustified; nor is the satisfaction that our colleagues take in their contribution to that curriculum. Our working group's meeting with department chairs reminded us how seriously historians take the mission of liberal education, while at the same time searching for ways to do it more effectively. Much needs to be done to improve the quality of history education, both for disciplinary and for liberal learning purposes. We have identified numerous challenges and possibilities that merit thoughtful consideration—and considerably more research. We need to know more about what assumptions historians have of prior knowledge of methods (acquired through precollegiate or general education) by students entering the history major. The extraordinary expansion of AP History education in the high schools offers both a challenge in the form of students replacing gateway courses with high school credits, and an opportunity because the standardization of AP provides us with better information about their preparation. We need to be more thoughtful in locating history in relation to other disciplines, and in relating to the “historical turn” in other humanities and social science disciplines. We need to rethink the nature of history courses for non-majors, and the role of history as a service discipline, since so frequently one or more history courses are required of all liberal arts undergraduates. Indeed, in many institutions, the largest number of students enrolled in history courses are majoring in another field.

The sequencing of history education deserves more thought, although with the possible exception of elite institutions of higher education, it is nearly impossible to impose sequences on a transient student population amidst a weakened institutional capacity to sustain a full range of course offerings. Accreditation regulations also generate constraints on course sequencing for history majors planning careers in precollegiate public education. We must also attend to the role of capstone and other culminating cognitive experiences. Indeed, one of the imperatives for reform of undergraduate history education may well be a full reconsideration of the implications of recent advances in learning theory for the structure of the undergraduate major—thus far, arguably, we have been better at reconceptualizing individual courses than in reimagining the major in the light of what we now know about student learning.

We surely need to make better use of information technology in our teaching and in the opportunities for student learning, and we have the advantage that historians such as Edward Ayers and the late Roy Rosenzweig (and the Centers they have created) have shown us how to begin. Liberal learning in the twenty-first century must include an emphasis on information sifting, the ability to work through massive quantities of data and references to identify what is useful and reliable. We need to do more with research and writing as critical components of undergraduate student learning. The core underlying skill in liberal learning is analytic thinking and expression, and this is a skill learned only in the doing.

We need to continue to consider both the role of study abroad and the potential of history as a form of experiential education that takes place as much outside the classroom as in it. This means a commitment to the exploration of how to link the global to the local

in our construction of the major. Part of history's appeal in this regard is its growing commitment to public history, which in the pedagogical context generally means taking advantage of local resources and explorations of local culture. This means in part training students to organize and present history to the general public (in archives, historical societies or government historical sites, for instance). It also demonstrates the materiality of history, the presence of the past in the physical environment that anchors everyday experience. In both cases—the practice of history in public venues, and the appreciation of the historical aspects of public culture, we teach that democracy requires an historically literate public. History, after all, is basic to civic culture, and the professional historian needs to rise to the responsibility of considering and shaping that culture. Preparing history graduates for responsible public positions in society should therefore be one of the goals of history education. Each department, in constructing its major, might ask what history should uniquely attempt to accomplish beyond the provision of general liberal learning skills.

The issue of desired historical and liberal learning outcomes should be revisited by history faculty regularly, and we encourage colleges and university to provide the resources necessary for such reflection and revision. Discussion of learning outcomes not only helps to craft meaningful major requirements, but also encourages faculty to think carefully about historical skills and liberal learning goals as they design and teach courses. Furthermore, such conversations will encourage faculty members to situate themselves within the larger liberal education mission of the university. These discussions in the departments should be supplemented with discussions with colleagues in other departments (including the library and centers for new media) and university administration about the goals of liberal

learning. We hope that university officials would encourage these cross-disciplinary conversations by initiating them and by finding ways to offer institutional rewards (or at least to remove disincentives) for faculty contributions to liberal education outside of the department.

## 2. Working Group Recommendations:

1. History departments should discuss and develop learning outcomes for the history major that emphasize historical content, historical skills, and the broader contributions history makes to liberal learning and civic engagement. This report offers a starting point for these discussions, but departments should articulate their own goals and engage in department-wide conversations. These desired learning outcomes might include:
  - Students should learn to analyze, evaluate, and contextualize different types of primary sources. They should learn to exercise critical judgment of these sources.
  - Students should learn how to travel across the seemingly infinite range of sources of information available online, including discriminating among sources, sifting information, and determining protocols of utility and relevance.
  - Students should learn to evaluate historical interpretations, and especially to recognize the difference between evaluation on grounds of evidence, logic, emotion, and identity.
  - Students should learn to formulate an historical question and develop basic skills and knowledge to find resources to answer that question.
  - Students should learn to formulate an historical argument and support it with evidence and appropriate documentation.
  - Students should understand the nature and practice of history. In addition to the skills above, they should learn to synthesize and to evaluate cause and effect. They should appreciate the differentness of the past and importance of contingency.
  - Students should be introduced to times, cultures, and perspectives different from their own.
  - Students should develop critical reading, writing, and oral communication skills.
  
2. In crafting major requirements, departments should aim to both introduce students to diverse geographic, chronological, and thematic subjects and build upon content and skills in a meaningful way. Departments should consider distribution requirements that encourage students to study at least three different periods, places, and topics. Departments should also consider the issue of sequencing courses so that students build upon skills and knowledge learned in other courses. While prerequisites and elaborate sequences may not be feasible at many institutions, there should be at least two levels of courses, one that is introductory and the other that assumes some previous historical skills and/or content. Furthermore, departments should examine the desirability and feasibility of concentration or specialization requirements within the major that enable students to study at least one subject in some depth.
  
3. Since historical skills are an essential component of the history major, departments should ensure that all history majors have the opportunity to “do” history. History majors should have the opportunity to take some seminars in which reading primary sources and writing are important components of the course. Information literacy

- and familiarity with new media have become essential. History majors should also have some introduction to historical methods through seminars, explicit methodology courses, and/or thesis writing. When feasible, foreign language competence and foreign study should be encouraged so that students can engage historical writing, primary sources, and historical subjects beyond the United States. Conversely the major should also include some engagement with local culture, enabling students to engage the materiality of historical learning. Collaborative work, increasingly the norm in other disciplines and in most occupations, should have a place in the major curriculum.
4. Institutions of higher education should provide venues and resources for faculty discussion of issues relating to the role of disciplinary majors in the context of liberal education. The current emphasis on interdisciplinarity is healthy; yet many students still opt for disciplinary majors and it is essential for faculty to discuss the relationship between disciplinary education and liberal education. These conversations should include centers for teaching and learning, centers for new media, libraries, and schools of education.
  5. Ph.D. granting institutions have already begun to consider more seriously their role as teachers of teachers. This consideration should be broadened to an exploration of how graduate students can be introduced to their role as members of a community of liberal arts educators. All post-secondary institutions can consider how new hires can be integrated into the liberal arts enterprise, a challenge that is already met effectively at many liberal arts colleges.
  6. History departments should discuss and craft assessment tools for history majors that effectively measure student mastery of these learning outcomes that integrate the goals of history education and liberal learning. These assessment tools will necessarily be varied and might include (but not be limited to) research papers, synthetic papers, oral arguments, written tests, essays, and collaborative work. A greater challenge lies in formulating “summative” rather than “formative” assessments: how can we measure the effectiveness of the major in producing a liberally educated citizen, with a thirst for lifelong learning and a commitment to civic engagement? As pressure on universities builds to demonstrate learning outcomes, history faculty must be on the forefront of these discussions or risk having them imposed in ways that may not accurately reflect the goals of the major.
  7. If the Teagle Foundation is to have a follow up grant program on disciplinary majors and liberal education, we recommend that they support a select number of departments to try out the White Paper recommendations and carry the process of departmental and institutional discussion forward. This support might come as funding, as a website to support continuing work and discussion of current practices and new ideas, and/or as a series of workshops. Ideally, the Teagle Foundation would support 5–10 history departments willing to commit to a process of discussion and reform. Beginning with the White Paper recommendations, these departments would revise and clarify their definition of the history department’s

role in their institution, contributions to liberal learning, and desired learning outcomes and assessment and devise institutional changes accordingly. These departments would commit to one or more meetings to set the agenda and one or more follow-up meetings to indicate what had been accomplished. This program might include conversations with other departments, especially those participating in this Teagle initiative. History departments might especially benefit from conversations with language departments, learning centers, libraries, and schools of education. We also recommend the following:

- Convene a working group that would address the question of how we can assess the value of a liberal education that has a history major at its center. This would include resources for gathering information about how departments currently assess the major (as opposed to assessment of courses or individual student work).
- Convene regional meetings of department chairs with this paper as the starting point for discussion
- Support workshops for graduate students and/or faculty in the largest graduate-training departments to discuss history and liberal education. Consider RFP for projects that create relationships between graduate training programs and liberal arts colleges.

**Appendix A: Survey Methodology**

We conducted a limited study of history major requirements at 55 diverse four-year colleges and universities. Our goal was not to design a comprehensive or even representative study of existing practices. Rather we sought to gather impressions on the history major; to gain a sense of the variety of major requirements and history goals, common trends and issues; and to identify some innovative practices. We also hoped to stimulate suggestions and insights from different types of institutions on how they envision the role of the history major in liberal education.

Our survey asked institutions about history major requirements and included several open-ended questions about the goals of the history major, liberal education, and the relationship between the two. We sent it to 50 universities, chosen at the suggestion of Task Force members for a variety of reasons, such as affiliation with the institution, interest in innovative practices, geographic diversity. We sought information from different types of institutions and therefore requested information from 10 institutions in each of five main categories: flagship state universities, private research universities, comprehensive (public) institutions, liberal arts colleges, and religious colleges and universities. Data was collected on the general or liberal arts history major. At some institutions, notably comprehensive public universities, there can be multiple history major tracks with differing requirements, including tracks for public history and history education. One respondent from a comprehensive institution pointed out that the majority of majors in the department are studying to be secondary education teachers and their curriculum is shaped by state licensing requirements.

We supplemented these departmental surveys with an open call on H-Teach for participation and also made the survey available on the National History Center website.

These efforts yielded 21 responses, many of which contained thoughtful reflections on the history major and liberal education that we incorporated into our task force discussions. We then used department and university websites to gather information on 34 additional institutions from our original list, taking note of published major requirements and departmental mission statements. Because of the limitations of this form of research, we were often not able to gather as much information on these institutions. Our findings were compiled and are on file with both the National History Center and Teagle Foundation. Because of confidentiality concerns, we have included here a narrative summary of the major findings but not the detailed compilations of responses.

With the important caveat that these findings are more impressionistic than scientific, our study found that at the institutions surveyed, the history major comprises on average, 28.58% of the credit hours that undergraduates take at their college or university. This ranges from 26.3% of the credits at flagship state universities to 30.3% of credit hours at liberal arts colleges, although at the latter the major often comprises fewer actual courses because of differences in how credit is allocated. The typical history major must take 9–12 history courses, usually half or more of these in “advanced” courses although institutions vary widely as to how many “advanced” courses they require and how they define them. Where data could be collected, we found that history majors as a percentage of the total undergraduate population varied greatly by institution both within and between categories, ranging from less than 1% of the total undergraduate population to over 7%.

Most institutions surveyed (85%) require breadth in the form of geographic distribution requirements. Most commonly, institutions require one or two courses in each of three different geographic areas: Europe, the United States, and “other” defined

variously as Non-West, Global, or Third World and which usually involves a choice of courses in Asian, African, Latin American, Middle Eastern, or Caribbean history. A handful of institutions do not privilege study of Europe and the United States and instead allow students to choose any three different geographic areas for study. About 20% of institutions require four or five different geographic areas instead of three.

In addition to breadth requirements, the majority of institutions studied (64%) require students to take one or more courses in “premodern” history. The definition of “pre-modern” varies, anywhere from pre-1500 to pre-1800 at different institutions. In addition, about one-third of institutions (33%) require a specialization or concentration within the history major in a geographic or thematic area. Typically schools require 3–5 courses in the area of specialization. It is notable that 7 of the 18 universities requiring this specialization are private research universities. Consequently, while 70% of private research universities studied require a concentration within the major, only 24% of all other institutions had this requirement.

Nearly every institution (96%) has a requirement for one or two courses that address historical methods, historiography, thesis writing, and/or serve as a “capstone” experience. While some institutions have clearly defined “historiography,” or “methods” courses, in the majority of cases differentiation between these categories is difficult because the courses are designed to fulfill multiple functions; therefore the finer distinctions on the data tables are not necessarily reliable. Most institutions appear to require one or two seminars, usually organized around particular historical topics and incorporating study of historical methods. Some institutions do not stipulate when the course(s) should be taken, but others require one course in the sophomore or junior year

and an additional course senior year; in these cases, the first course is often a gateway or introduction to historical methods and the second course a capstone experience.

Historiography appears to be integrated into some of these classes, but it receives much less emphasis than methods. Few institutions offer straightforward “historiography” courses.

Although most of these required seminars for majors appear to have some writing and research components, less than a quarter of institutions (22%) actually require a substantial senior thesis of all history majors. Notably, no flagship state university and only one comprehensive institution reported requiring senior theses. A majority, however, (53%) provide the opportunity for thesis writing. In nearly all cases, these optional theses are required to graduate with honors.

Finally, institutions reported a variety of other requirements for the history major. Thirteen institutions (24%) reported requiring history majors to defend their senior thesis, although the majority of these were requirements for honors students only. Thirteen institutions (24%) require students to complete a portfolio; in most cases, this appears to be a college-wide requirement rather than one designed by the history department. Likewise a handful of institutions (less than 12% in each category) require foreign language study, comprehensive exams, or a writing requirement, but in most of these cases these appear to be university-wide requirements that are incorporated into the major rather than requirements initiated by the history department. Several institutions provided opportunities and emphasis on internships or service learning but no institutions reported requiring them.

In their responses to our survey and on their departmental websites, history departments articulated a number of key goals for the history major and thoughtful

consideration of the ways in which the history major contributes to liberal education more broadly. Responses tended to fall into two categories. First, departments articulated the ways in which the study and practice of history builds key analytical skills and habits of mind that are important for liberal education. Second, they emphasized the particular contributions that history as a subject of study makes to understanding our world and place within it, a key goal of liberal education.

Most departments articulated the goals of the history major as building crucial critical thinking skills. Departments frequently noted the ways in which the history major builds analytical skills, particularly through its interpretation and analysis of secondary and primary texts and defined critical reading, research, and writing skills as top goals for the major. Departments also emphasized the ways in which the history major builds communication skills, both written and oral. Others emphasized the ways in which the history major aims to develop problem solving and research skills; students are expected to learn how to define research problems, to locate relevant information, and to employ critical methods and different types of data to solve those problems. Some departments emphasized historical thinking as a goal of the history major and an important contribution to liberal education, emphasizing the importance of understanding change over time, contextualizing the present, and placing events and texts in specific temporal and geographic contexts. As one respondent noted, “The study of history creates a context of understanding, particularly of human environments, for the other disciplines of knowledge. History enables students to contextualize power and culture as determinants of human behavior, demands evidence-based reasoning, and provides cross-cultural comparisons of societies and beliefs. As such, it provides a foundation and a further route for a

sophisticated, multi-faceted education.” Others similarly emphasized the ways in which history, as a broad and catholic discipline, promotes complex thinking and requires attention to institutions, social structures, culture, social context, power relations, and everyday life.

Many departments argued that the study of history provides important contributions to broad goals of liberal education, by contextualizing one’s own life and society in time and geographic space, promoting cross-cultural understanding and appreciation for the diversity of human experience, and encouraging civic engagement. History, many departments argue, encourages students to examine their place in the world around them, through comparative analysis of world’s civilizations and a study of their own society’s development and interactions in the world. Many history majors are explicitly structured to foster this breadth of view, with requirements for the study of history in three or more different geographic areas. Furthermore, many departments evinced a commitment to producing history majors who are civically informed and engaged, citing myriad opportunities within the department or university for activism, public service, and community participation. Others argued that history as a discipline contributes to civic engagement by focusing on citizenship and how shared civic ideals have developed over time. History provides important knowledge of the historical development of public policy, the institutions of civil society, and how individuals constitute societies and relate to one another. Still others argue that historical perspective is crucial for understanding contemporary social and civic issues.

## Appendix B: The Survey Instrument

### National History Center's Teagle Survey

#### 1. General Information on History Undergraduate Major

National History Center promotes the role of historical scholarship and understanding in public discourse, especially with regard to public policy. In early 2007, the Center was awarded by the Teagle Foundation, a grant to undertake the study of the role of historical study in liberal learning, particularly how a history major prepares students for diverse career paths, and for avocational interests that enhance civic engagement in their communities. We have formed a working group of leading scholars and educators to consider the goals of liberal learning and the undergraduate history major. We plan to circulate our findings in written form and convene open forums on the subject and hope that our work generates a broader professional and public discussion.

In undertaking this work, it is necessary to have a snapshot of the undergraduate history major as it now exists in different types of institutions, and we would like to include your department in the study.

#### \* 1. University and Respondent's contact information:

Name:

Company:

Address:

Address 2:

City/Town:

State/Province:

ZIP/Postal Code:

Country:

2. Hours/courses required for major:

3. Total hours/courses required for graduation:

4. Is the university on semester or quarter system?

5. Double majors allowed?

6. Double majors encouraged?

7. Approximate number of history majors:

8. Total undergraduate students on campus:

9. Number of introductory courses required:

10. Average class size of introductory courses:

11. Number of advanced courses required:

## National History Center's Teagle Survey

12. Average class size of advanced courses:

13. Are non-**history majors required to take history courses? If so, how many?**

14. Approximate percentage of history lecture-based courses:

15. Approximate percentage of history courses that are largely discussion:

16. Are students required to take courses in other disciplines for the major?

17. Are students permitted to take courses in other disciplines towards the major?

18. What are the requirements for honors?

19. What proportion of history majors are involved in honors?

20. Can students minor in history?

21. Are history majors able to incorporate foreign study requirements for the major?

22. Who is responsible for advising? Do majors have advisors in the history department?

23. Is there a writing requirement for the major?

## National History Center's Teagle Survey

### 2. Undergraduate Major Requirements:

If a requirement falls into multiple categories, please note it. For example, a required senior seminar that is designed as both a capstone and thesis writing course can be checked as "required" for both categories and the course name indicated in the final column: i.e. "Hist 499".

#### 24. Undergraduate Major Requirements Include:

	Required	Optional	None
Geographic distribution	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chronology (ex: pre-modern requirement)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Specialization	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Capstone course(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Methods course(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Historiography course(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thesis writing course(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pedagogy/teaching course(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public History course(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Senior Thesis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thesis Defense	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comprehensive Exams	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foreign Language	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Portfolio/Assessment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public Service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Internship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Requirement explanation/Course name(s)

## National History Center's Teagle Survey

### 3. Undergraduate history activities and opportunities:

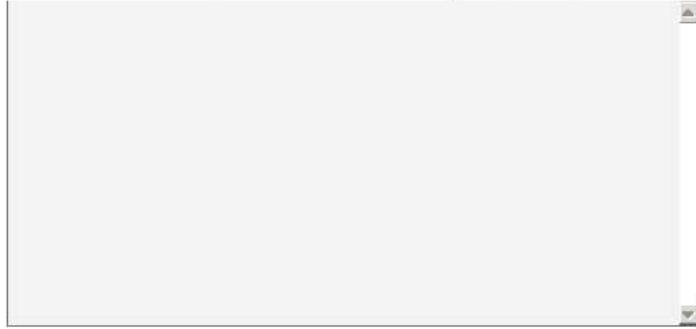
Please check all that apply

#### 25. Majors can participate in the following:

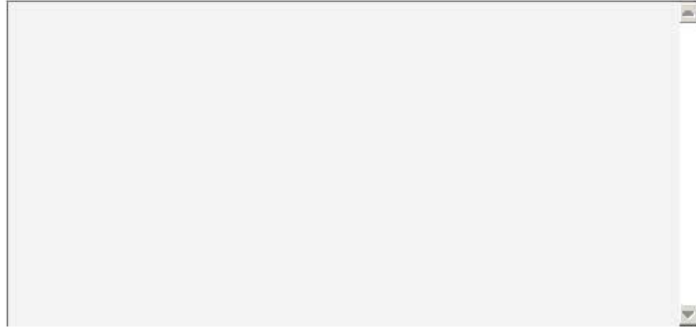
- Phi Alpha Theta Chapter
- Undergraduate Prizes
- Other History Associations
- Symposium
- Student Journal
- Funding/grants for research
- Other (please specify)

**National History Center's Teagle Survey****4. Write in Questions.**

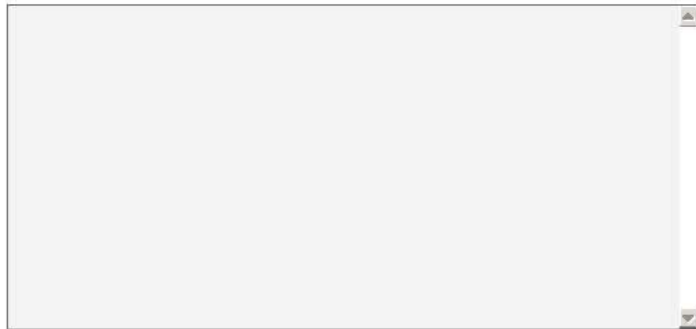
**26. What is the department's sense of the post-graduation plans of history majors?  
Are the career implications of a history major important to the department?**



**27. Is the department interested in recruiting people in the history teaching profession? If so, K-12 or post-secondary?**

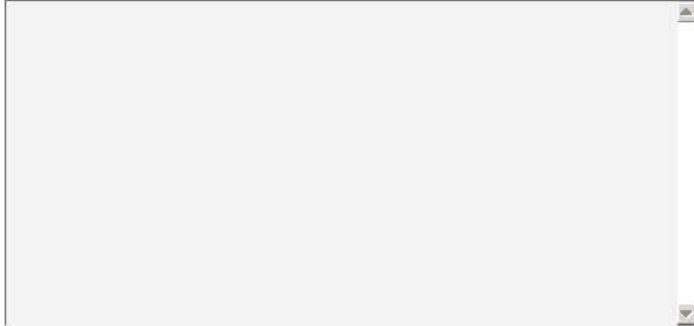


**28. How do you envision history contributing to liberal education?**

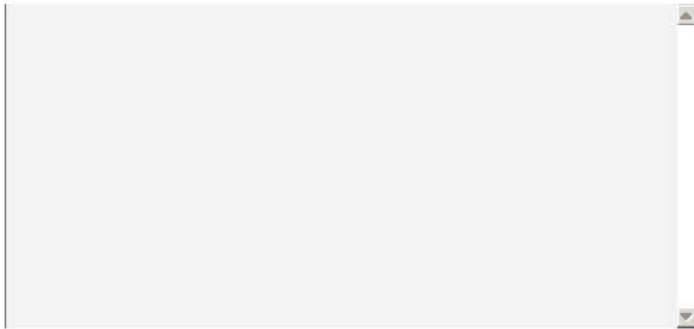


**National History Center's Teagle Survey**

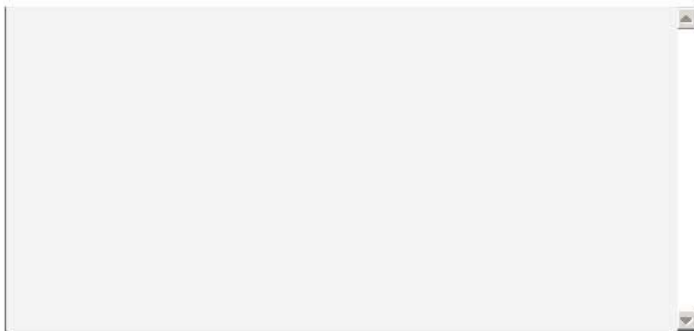
**29. How do you envision the history major contributing to civic engagement? Are there any departmental or university requirements or opportunities that aim to promote civic engagement?**

A large, empty rectangular text box with a light gray background and a thin black border. It is intended for the respondent to provide an answer to question 29. There are small upward-pointing triangles in the top right corner and downward-pointing triangles in the bottom right corner, indicating it is a scrollable area.

**30. Is there a relationship between the mission of your college/university and the structure of the history major?**

A large, empty rectangular text box with a light gray background and a thin black border. It is intended for the respondent to provide an answer to question 30. There are small upward-pointing triangles in the top right corner and downward-pointing triangles in the bottom right corner, indicating it is a scrollable area.

**31. What is your expectation of what students ought to be able to do when they complete the major?**

A large, empty rectangular text box with a light gray background and a thin black border. It is intended for the respondent to provide an answer to question 31. There are small upward-pointing triangles in the top right corner and downward-pointing triangles in the bottom right corner, indicating it is a scrollable area.

**Appendix C: Institutions/categories included in the survey:**Flagship State Universities:

1. University of Michigan
2. University of Iowa
3. UCLA
4. University of Georgia
5. University of Texas\*
6. Arizona State University
7. University of Washington\*
8. University of Wyoming
9. University of Wisconsin
10. University of Virginia

Private Research Universities:

1. Columbia University
2. Princeton University\*
3. Stanford University
4. University of Chicago\*
5. Emory University
6. New York University\*
7. Duke University
8. Howard University
9. Brown University
10. Washington University\*
11. American University\*

Comprehensive Institutions:

1. Rutgers-Camden University\*
2. Western Michigan University
3. Temple University
4. College of Charleston
5. Rowan University
6. Bowling Green State University\*
7. San Jose State University\*
8. James Madison University\*
9. Pittsburg State University\*
10. University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire\*

Liberal Arts Colleges:

1. Denison University\*
2. Trinity College
3. Reed College
4. Carleton College\*
5. Spelman College
6. Amherst College
7. Dickinson College
8. Goucher College
9. Grinnell College\*
10. Albertson College\*

Religious Institutions:

1. Calvin College
2. Earlham College
3. John Carroll University
4. Boston College
5. Notre Dame University
6. Pacific Lutheran University
7. Pepperdine University
8. Marquette University
9. Southern Methodist University
10. Campbell University\*
11. Texas Wesleyan University\*
12. Marian College\*
13. Muskingum College\*
14. Oklahoma City University\*

TOTAL INSTITUTIONS: 55

\* = Received survey response

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