



A new curriculum for History

REDESIGNING OUR MAJORS CONFERENCE, AUGUST 19 2017

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Overarching questions

- How does a department in the Humanities area revise a long-established curriculum in a changing disciplinary environment, in the face of shifting student demand, with the objectives of increasing student learning and success?
- How can we use evidence of student needs and outcomes?
- How can we enable faculty to lead and tailor a program to our expertise while still agreeing on a shared set of competencies and knowledge for our major students?

Motives

- Data showed the number of majors and FTES declining.
- Faculty turn-over meant that the department now has a large number of younger faculty who have a different understanding of our students' needs and the shape of the field.
- We needed to develop an awareness of our students' plans and alumni experiences to see whether we could make our majors more career-ready.
- We could benefit from an assessment of whether students were achieving the goals we had established, in the process addressing curricular coherence.
- We wanted to evaluate whether our students were graduating in a timely manner and to devise a plan to assist them through advising and curricular processes.



Process principle

- We designed our plan around a principle of inclusivity, which meant that we needed active engagement and participation from across the faculty throughout, through formal committees, ad hoc working groups, and collective discussion.

Process steps

- Fall 2016 – work on PLOs, identify and collect data, identify problems and opportunities at each stage of curriculum
- Spring 2017 – Department retreat to discuss data, develop new advising plan
- Fall 2017 – Proposals for specific curricular revisions open to all department for submission, advising training, alignment of proposals with PLOs
- Spring 2017 – Debate, refinement, and adoption of new curriculum
- Fall 2018 - New curriculum in place

Redesigning our learning outcomes

- Curriculum committee guided the design through a series of interactive exercises at meetings.
- The department identified five competencies before the meetings, which we then developed into PLOs. These were: Knowing, Understanding, Ethics, Research Skills, and Communication Skills.
- Initially we thought we would design and complete the PLOs and then move on, but we have found it necessary to keep them as working drafts, constantly revising as we go along

New PLOs

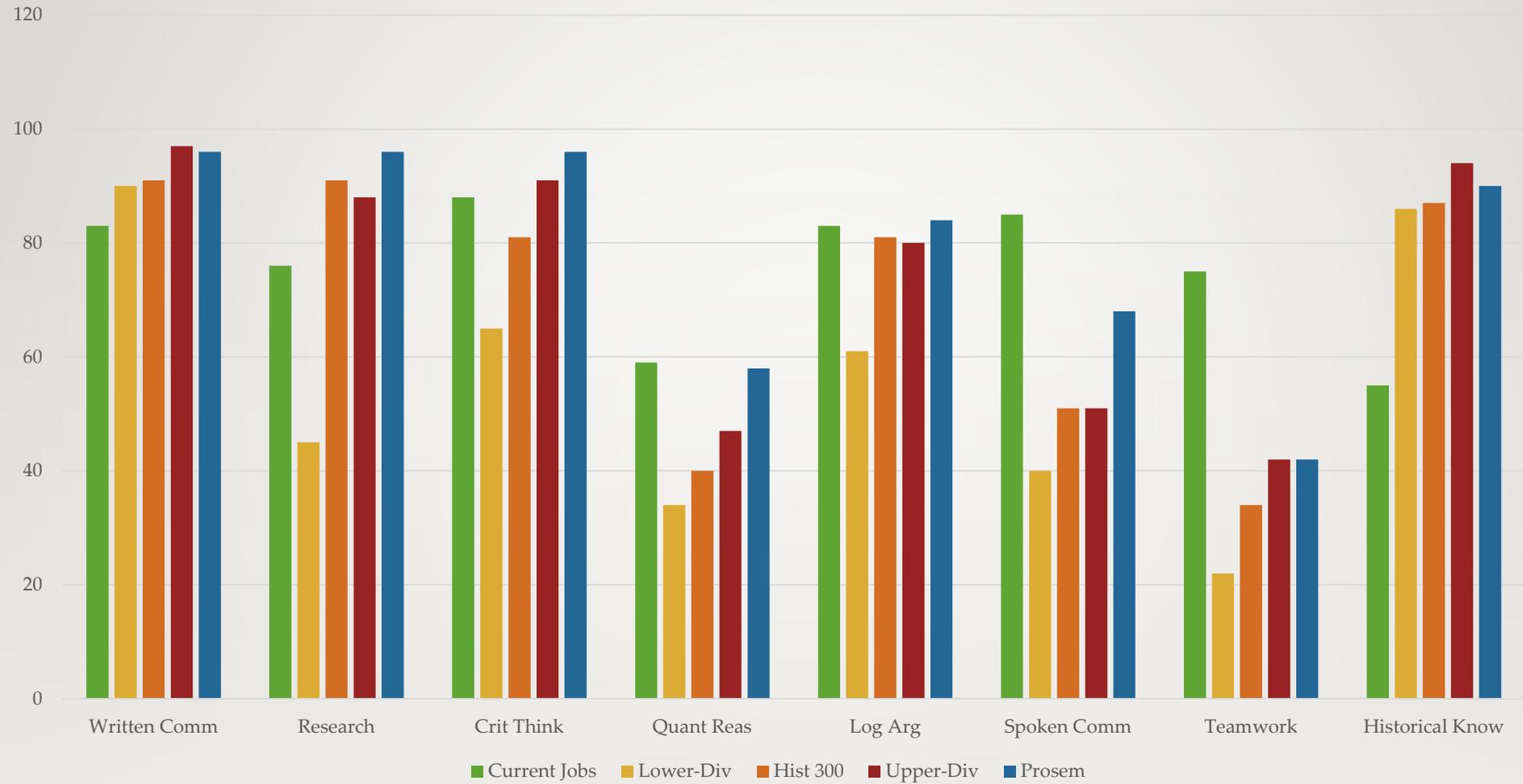
- Students will be able to express knowledge about a geographic and chronological diversity of human experiences, identities, and relationships, both between people and between humans and the natural world, in order to understand the world beyond themselves. (**Knowing**)
- Students will be able to approach complex issues in the past from multiple perspectives, understanding causal relationships in a way that allows them to recognize alternate and resonant ways of being in the world across time and space. (**Understanding**)
- Students will be able to critically assess how power has operated in the past, developing the keen sense of empathy and appreciation for the humanity of others afforded by a perspective informed by social justice and an attention to diversity and inclusivity. (**Ethics**)
- Students will be able to conduct their own research using primary sources in order to make compelling arguments about the past, situating their conclusions within the debates among historians. (**Research Skills**)
- Students will be able to organize evidence, communicate complex information, tell engaging stories, and persuade their audience using both written and oral forms of communication. (**Communication Skills**)



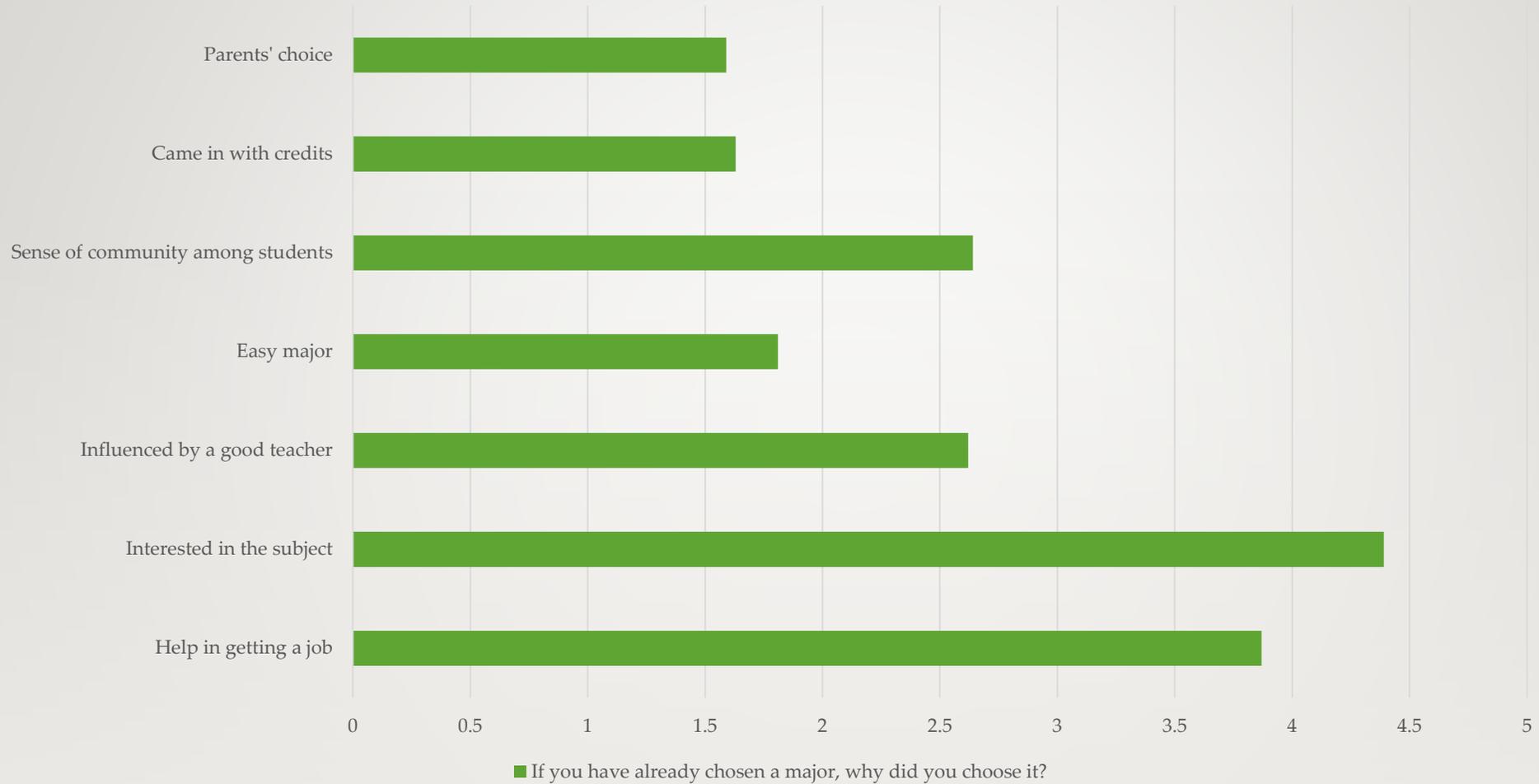
Evidence

- An in-class survey of students in lower division GE courses as to how they select their majors
- A Qualtrics survey of history majors, minors, and graduate students
- A comprehensive alumni survey
- Surveys of faculty on their courses and student achievement
- Data on ethnicity and gender in the major compared to the university

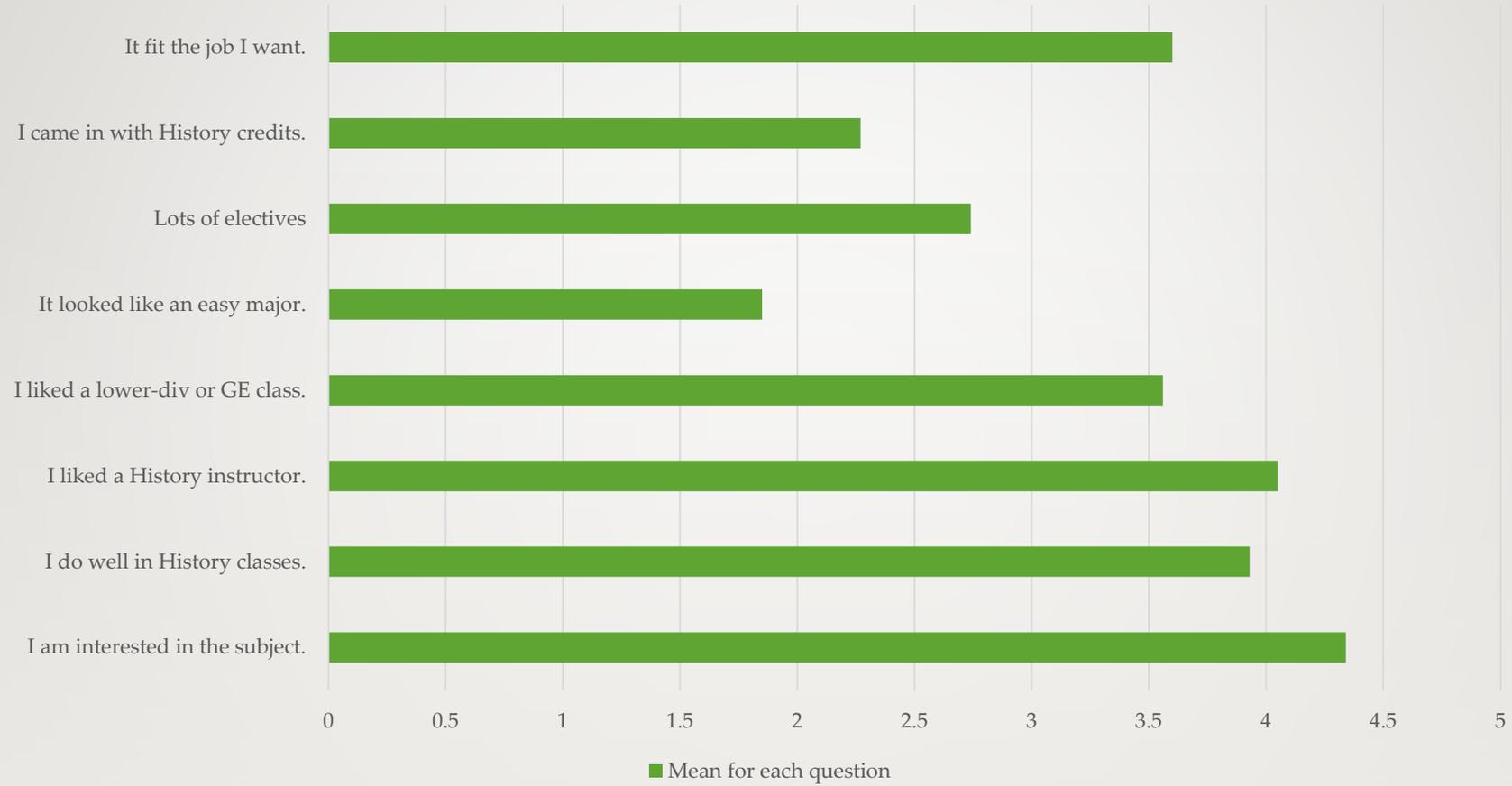
Skills in History Classes



If you have already chosen a major, why did you choose it?



Why History?



Some curricular proposals

- Revise lower-division courses to be more skill based, and require fewer of them
- Expand our mid-level “GWAR” course into two courses that better support student research and student writing
- Renumber upper-division courses and redesign requirements to make sure students take some research courses between the “GWAR” and the culminating experience seminar
- Add some methodology-centered courses in public-, digital-, teaching history
- Develop and adhere to a concise definition of the culminating experience so that it better builds on foundations of students’ previous historical studies.

Supporting the curriculum

- Develop undergraduate coordinators and assign students to faculty advisors
- Organize group-advising sessions
- Require some advising in History 300
- Better advertise course availability
- Develop pedagogy-strong working groups and model assignments for certain classes
- Assess assess assess!



Looking back from 2025

- Clearer curriculum and more effective advising, so that students better understand how to efficiently move toward graduation
 - Clearer roadmap and stronger scaffolding of skills through the program, so that students experience greater success in their classes
 - A curriculum that better prepares students for the 21st-century workforce and to be critically conscious and socially aware global citizens
 - A curriculum that better represents current trends in our field and our current areas of expertise, so that faculty feel more invested in the goals and outcomes of the program
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