

Faculty Fellows Project Report – David Paradis

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My project is related to the coordination of Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) in the Department of History so that we can collectively ensure that History majors and minors graduate with a clearly defined set of skills. I first developed an interest in this topic in the Spring of 2017 when working with in the ASSETT Teaching Fellows program.

In early 2017 our department received a grant from the College of Arts & Sciences to improve teaching in the Department of History. Shortly thereafter, the department chair hired a postdoctoral History teaching specialist, Dr. Natalie Mendoza, to spearhead the alignment of SLOs across the department. To support Dr. Mendoza the department chair organized a working group of faculty and one graduate student into the History Teaching and Learning Project (HTLP). I am one of seven members of this working group.

One of the primary objectives of the working group is to define the discipline-specific skills that our majors can expect to develop. Aside from the general skills of close reading, advanced literacy development, analysis, and professional writing that many liberal arts majors offer, the skills specific to historical analysis have been the focus of the working group's efforts. Guided by Dr. Mendoza's experience with the American Historical Association, we have read a series of articles and discussed a number of topics related to pedagogical research in general and teaching history in particular. We have met once a month as a group but also at other times in the larger context of the entire department in order to discuss these topics. In addition, Dr. Mendoza has invited recognized leaders in the field of historical teaching to speak to the department faculty as a whole. The working group is currently in the process of synthesizing input from the entire department related to these topics and their relationship to the SLOs. Our objective is to have departmental consensus on the SLOs by the end of the 2017-2018 academic year and to begin to implement some of them in the following academic year.

Because this project is still in process it is too early to evaluate its success and failures. Clearly, one of our biggest challenges is to stay focused on the SLOs. Often when faculty gather to discuss teaching, various stories about individual experiences emerge. While interesting and informative, these stories can distract from the somewhat methodical work associated with developing concisely elaborated SLOs. Dr. Mendoza has helped us to maintain that focus.

From what I can gather, the process of defining and coordinating SLOs is not a one-and-done type of activity. Departments need to continually revisit and revise their SLOs in order to ensure that they serve their majors and minors as effectively as possible. I hope to be part of that effort down the road. To learn more about that we are doing, please visit our website at <https://www.colorado.edu/history/history-teaching-and-learning-project>.