The History Teaching & Learning Project: Laying the Groundwork for Departmental Change at the University of Colorado Boulder

Natalie Mendoza, Phoebe S. K. Young, and Paul S. Sutter

Our history department at the University of Colorado (CU) Boulder has long been dedicated to quality teaching. Tenure-track faculty invest considerable energy in their courses and teach the lion's share of the curriculum, including most introductory courses. With our teaching-line colleagues, we strongly identify as good teachers, pursue innovative pedagogy, and care about our students' success. Yet with the decline of humanities enrollments after the great recession of 2007–2009, we recognized that something was not getting through to our students (or their parents) about the value of history as a discipline. For all the dynamic work happening in our classrooms, our curriculum was too content-driven, and it did not communicate how our students would develop the discipline's signature competencies as they navigated the major. We needed our students to see the value of history for understanding the world and to appreciate that they were gaining valuable skills relevant to various career paths. While we had tweaked the major over the years, history still looked, well, stuck in the past.

Our desire to refresh the study of history at CU Boulder coincided with an era of rising scholarly attention to the practices that foster student learning and educational transformation. Historians had started to engage with the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), asking what it means to study history, determining which practices and assessments were best suited to teaching history, and using this knowledge to articulate the relevance of history beyond the academy. The Tuning the History Discipline in the United States project, launched by the American Historical Association (AHA) in 2012, was foundational in creating a framework of core competencies for the discipline. In 2016, Lendol Calder and Tracy Steffes issued an important call to historians to develop effective assessments that align with defined learning objectives. And to promote original research in SoTL and its use among historians, the AHA issued two sets of principles in 2019: "Guidelines for the Incorporation of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in the Work of the History Profession" and "Guidelines for Historians for the Professional Evaluation of

Natalie Mendoza is an assistant professor of history at the Unversity of Colorado Boulder.
Readers may contact Mendoza at natalie.mendozagutierrez@colorado.edu.

Phoebe S. K. Young is a professor of history at the University of Colorado Boulder.
Readers may contact Young at phoebe.young@colorado.edu.

Paul S. Sutter is a professor of history at the University of Colorado Boulder.
Readers may contact Sutter at paul.sutter@colorado.edu.

the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning." We were clearly not the only ones thinking about these issues.[1]

In 2017, amid rising disciplinary interest in history SoTL, our department created the History Teaching & Learning Project (HTLP), which sought to harness the insights of these national efforts to reform our curriculum. HTLP built upon recent evidence suggesting that the department is the key unit and the right scale for driving pedagogical transformation. Our project design also drew upon methods used in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) disciplines. At CU Boulder, STEM departments have been national leaders in the development of innovative research-based initiatives to advance systemic educational transformation, and we believed their methods—and particularly the "embedded-expert model"—could be adapted to the humanities. As evidence from STEM departments had shown, bringing in an external colleague with discipline-based SoTL expertise to partner with faculty in a single department could facilitate productive conversations and accelerate change.[2]

In this article, we offer a framework for pursuing pedagogical and curricular change at the departmental level. We discuss the origins and development of HTLP, including the creation of a postdoctoral position for an embedded expert who led the project, as well as the strategies and methods used over a two-year period to identify challenges, engage faculty, and meet our key goals. We also highlight the ancillary benefits of undertaking such a project in an era of increasing top-down pressures to better assess student learning, and at a moment when we need to defend the virtues of studying history in an often-hostile political arena. By sharing the experiences of a single department, this article will be of value to those considering systemic curricular or pedagogical change, contemplating shifting accreditation and assessment criteria, working to articulate the value of a history

[1] For works that engage the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, see Lendol Calder, William W. Cutler III, and T. Mills Kelly, "History Lessons: Historians and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning," in *Disciplinary Styles in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: Exploring Common Ground,* ed. Mary Taylor Huber and Sherwyn P. Morreale (Washington, 2002), 45–67; David Pace, "The Amateur in the Operating Room: History and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning," *American Historical Review,* 109 (Oct. 2004), 1171–92; Lendol Calder, "Uncoverage: Toward a Signature Pedagogy for the History Survey," *Journal of American History,* 92 (March 2006), 1358–70; and Laura Westhoff, "Historiographic Mapping: Toward a Signature Pedagogy for the Methods Course," *ibid.*, 98 (March 2012), 1114–26. Lendol Calder and Tracy Steffes, "Measuring College Learning in History," in *Improving Quality in American Higher Education: Learning Outcomes and Assessments for the 21st Century,* ed. Richard Arum, Josipa Roksa, and Amanda Cook (San Francisco, 2016), 37–86; "Tuning the History Discipline in the United States," 2012, *American Historical Association,* https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/tuning-the-history-discipline; Natalie Mendoza, David Pace, and Laura Westhoff, "Guidelines for the Incorporation of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in the Work of the History Profession," Jan. 2019, *ibid.*, https://www .historians.org/jobs-and -professional-development/statements-standards-and-guidelines-of-the-discipline/guidelines-for-the -incorporation-of-the-scholarship-of-teaching-and-learning-in-the-work-of-the-history-profession; "Guidelines for Historians for the Professional Evaluation of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning," June 2019, *ibid.*, https:// www.historians.org/jobs-and-professional-development/statements-standards-and-guidelines-of-the-discipline/ guidelines-for-historians-for-the-professional-evaluation-of-the-scholarship-of-teaching-and-learning.

[2] Adrianna J. Kezar, *How Colleges Change: Understanding, Leading, and Enacting Change* (New York, 2013); Joel C. Corbo et al., "Framework for Transforming Departmental Culture to Support Educational Innovation," *Physical Review Physical Education Research,* 12 (no. 1, 2016), 010113-1–010113-15; Daniel L. Reinholz et al., "Transforming Undergraduate Education from the Middle Out with Departmental Action Teams," *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning,* 51 (no. 5, 2019), 64–70; Carl Wieman, *Improving How Universities Teach Science: Lessons from the Science Education Initiative* (Cambridge, Mass., 2017); Andrea Follmer Greenhoot et al., "Variations on Embedded Expert Models: Implementing Change Initiatives that Support Departments from Within," in *Transforming Institutions: Accelerating Systemic Change in Higher Education,* ed. Kate White et al. (Montreal, 2020), 313–26; Stephanie Chasteen, "Transforming Education, Supporting Teaching and Learning Excellence (TRESTLE)," 2016, *University of Colorado Boulder Center for STEM Learning,* https://www.colorado.edu/csl/trestle-0.

degree, or seeking to ignite productive collective discussions about the highest purposes and most effective methods for teaching our students.

Origin and Project Design

Prior to beginning htlp, the history department at cu Boulder had about thirty-five permanent faculty, approximately three hundred majors, and a few dozen minors. Majors had declined precipitously from a high of over six hundred less than a decade earlier. In the years after that apex, we took measures to make our major more demanding by increasing the number of required credit hours (from thirty-three to thirty-six) and adding two cornerstone courses: an introduction to global history and an upper-division methods course. Unfortunately, our efforts collided with the nationwide downturn in humanities majors. Our nonmajor student credit hours (sch) initially remained high due to our college's core curriculum requirements, but a 2018 shift to a new General Education curriculum resulted in a modest but concerning decline in nonmajor sch since then. Additionally, pandemic-era budget austerity and incentivized retirements brought our permanent faculty numbers below thirty. Despite these dispiriting trends, anecdotal evidence suggested a resurgence of interest in history, as our students sought to understand the disorienting changes made visible by the 2016 election and its aftermath. With htlp, we hoped to build on such interest to stabilize our enrollments and reenvision how our department could communicate the critical importance of studying history.

In the fall of 2016, we applied for a grant from a new campus program called the Undergraduate Education Development Program (uedp), which provided funding to College of Arts and Sciences departments that wanted to engage in educational innovation. We began to design a project to rethink our undergraduate curriculum and improve current pedagogies. We aimed to address several key challenges: how to support student learning; how to best articulate to students, parents, and the public the value of historical study, including what it means to study history; and how to help majors use historical skills and literacy after they graduated, both in their chosen careers and as citizens. Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies Anne Lester (Phoebe Young would soon take over this position) convened an ad hoc committee to prepare the uedp proposal, inviting interested departmental faculty to join. Initial discussions identified three overarching goals:

1. to develop department-wide consensus on Student Learning Objectives (slos)
2. to cultivate a sustainable culture of scholarly teaching; and
3. to update the undergraduate curriculum and major pathway with pedagogical practices and assessments appropriate for teaching to the slos

In considering how to achieve these goals, we conferred with campus colleagues who had embarked on similar efforts, and we decided to focus on the embedded-expert model, which would be recognizable to administrators reviewing our proposal, given its success in science education initiatives on campus. We also hoped an embedded expert would help us raise our knowledge of history SoTL. Finally, the embedded expert solved a basic personnel problem: none of our permanent faculty had the time or bandwidth to lead such an endeavor. We thus proposed hiring a postdoctoral research associate, with advanced training in history and pedagogical expertise, to facilitate faculty discussions. We believed it was

important to reach department-wide consensus on project goals, especially the SLOs, and that the external expert would be well positioned to do so. This model offered several advantages: it bolstered our collective access to SoTL resources, it brought in a neutral expert to cultivate faculty engagement, and it allowed the work to proceed swiftly without placing a heavy burden on faculty time. Although departmental leadership (Elizabeth Fenn was the chair when we applied for the UEDP grant, with Paul S. Sutter assuming the role in fall 2017, when the project began) explicitly communicated the expectation of increased faculty focus on this effort for a two-year period, having a postdoctoral associate dedicated exclusively to HTLP was critical to facilitating the project. While concerns existed about a relatively junior colleague leading such an important department-wide initiative, a fully committed departmental leadership protected the embedded expert from blowback. Fortunately, and to the great credit of our colleagues, there was little.[3]

It is important to note here that there are workable alternatives to bringing in an outside expert, which might be cost prohibitive for many departments or programs. An internal leader, such as an interested faculty member given release from teaching or who takes it on as their sole service assignment, could also effectively direct such a project. The opportunity for them to gain familiarity with history SoTL and educational transformation scholarship would be vital, as would funding for events and faculty engagement. A graduate student research assistant or even a highly motivated undergraduate might also support faculty in such work. Another possibility would be to involve a campus teaching and learning center (something we were not able to do because our campus's center was not created until 2019). While there are distinct advantages to bringing in an external leader for such a project, an internal leader would have the benefit of familiarity with departmental and administrative culture.

The College of Arts and Sciences approved our UEDP proposal, and, after a national search, we hired a postdoctoral research associate, Natalie Mendoza, to facilitate HTLP. As an externally funded project run by a postdoctoral expert, HTLP was designed to be of limited duration, but we hoped to create mechanisms in our standard departmental practices to carry the project forward beyond its formal existence. To this end, we developed two key instruments that were central to meeting HTLP goals. The first was the HTLP Working Group, combining five or six faculty volunteers plus one graduate student instructor to support Mendoza in her work by investigating teaching practices and challenges. The working group played an advisory role to the department, and both modeled and experimented with the kinds of SoTL-based pedagogical changes we envisioned as vital to the success of the project. Working groups, with personnel that changed annually, were critical to leading the culture change we sought. To encourage participation in the working group, the department chair provided modest additional research funding to those who volunteered. The second instrument we used to meet HTLP goals was the Workshop & Discussion meeting, which provided a platform for our faculty to talk together and learn from invited speakers—history pedagogy experts from different institutions who shared their knowledge with our department.

In the first year of HTLP, we focused primarily on developing department-wide consensus on SLOs. Our aim was to create SLOs that reflected the discipline-specific skills, concepts, and habits paramount to becoming proficient in historical thinking in the

---

[3] Rachel E. Pepper et al., "Facilitating Faculty Conversations: Development of Consensus Learning Goals," *AIP Conference Proceedings: 2011 Physics Education Research Conference,* 1413 (no. 1, 2012), 291–94.

classroom and beyond. The AHA's Tuning Project provided a model for us to consider as we aimed to generate SLOs that reflected broad departmental consensus. Faculty creation of custom SLOs required considerable time and effort, but the process allowed HTLP to penetrate deeper into the department's DNA than the adoption of any external template would have. Progress on the second goal accompanied our work on the SLOs, as the process helped us create collegial and collaborative spaces that fostered a culture of scholarly teaching driven by research rather than anecdotes or wisdom-of-practice articles. That is to say, the long iterative SLO process proved to be a feature, not a bug. We adopted a shared language, and evidence-based practices gleaned from history SoTL research informed our discussions and inspired our efforts to innovate our pedagogy.[4]

Implementation Goal 1: Developing Student Learning Objectives

Our conversation about departmental SLOs began with our first Workshop & Discussion meeting in Fall 2017, and we used the AHA's Tuning Project to jump-start our thinking. The guest speaker, Anne Hyde, was, from 2011 to 2013, the faculty director of the Tuning Project, a multi-institutional effort that developed the history discipline core document describing what students should know and be able to do upon earning a bachelor's degree in history. Hyde provided us with an essential foundation for pursuing our HTLP goals.

Following this first workshop, Mendoza surveyed faculty perceptions about teaching challenges, learning objectives, instructional practices, and assessments. She gathered information from interviews conducted with every tenured, tenure-track, and teaching-line faculty member. For additional information on learning objectives, she performed a thorough content analysis on recent course syllabi. Using history SoTL research and other resources, such as "AHA History Tuning Project: 2016 History Discipline Core," Mendoza organized a preliminary SLO list that reflected the disciplinary skills and concepts we already taught in our courses or had cited in our interviews with her. During a late fall 2017 department meeting, she presented the faculty with an initial draft list of SLOs, based on her data collection, that then served as the basis for future faculty discussions.[5]

Two additional features of our project design supported the iterative process of developing and approving SLOs. First, as chair, Sutter devoted portions of regular departmental meetings for review and comment on SLO drafts. This minimized demands on busy faculty schedules by relying on time already set aside for department business, while also communicating the importance of department-wide consensus on the SLOs. Second, between full-faculty discussions, Mendoza and the working group revised the SLOs by incorporating faculty feedback. Those iterations then circulated back to the entire department for further refinement. Through such a telescoping process, the working group fine-tuned the SLOs based on full-faculty input while avoiding the logistical challenges of full-faculty authorship. This proved to be an efficient way to work toward departmental consensus.

We quickly realized that this slow, consensus-building approach was necessary to achieve the central goal of developing a durable set of SLOs. A top-down approach from

    [4] Arlene Díaz et al., "The History Learning Project: A Department 'Decodes' Its Students," *Journal of American History,* 94 (March 2008), 1211–24; Pace, "The Amateur in the Operating Room," 1171–92; Lee S. Shulman, "Teaching as Community Property: Putting an End to Pedagogical Solitude," *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning,* 25 (Nov.–Dec. 1993), 6–8.
    [5] "AHA History Tuning Project: 2016 History Discipline Core," Dec. 2016, *American Historical Association,* https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/tuning-the-history-discipline/2016-history-discipline-core.

HTLP leadership would have been more expedient, but it would have—appropriately—been met with resistance. We also accommodated varying levels of faculty engagement and enthusiasm, from those who were already highly motivated to employ SoTL, to others who were curious but unaware of its applications, to those who remained unsure about the project's worth. Our colleagues seemed to appreciate the opportunity to think and talk about teaching, something we rarely could do before HTLP. And the conversations that resulted from sharing different perspectives on teaching and responding to the ideas of guest speakers were incredibly valuable.

In September 2019, two years after Hyde's visit, the department overwhelmingly approved the SLOs through a formal vote of the faculty, and we immediately put the SLOs to use. We posted the document on our Web site and asked faculty to add relevant SLOs to their syllabi, link them to course learning goals, and discuss them with students as they saw fit. Having these SLOs in place has also been handy in meeting campus-wide requests. For instance, in response to a concern from our institution's accreditor in the fall of 2019, the administration requested that all departments add learning goals to the major program description. Rather than scrambling to define something, as many units did, we had a vetted set of robust SLOs to include. At a time when many departments are facing top-down mandates on matters such as teaching evaluation and assessment of student learning, we found great value in a bottom-up process that allowed us to get ahead of these initiatives and define our own goals.

Implementation Goal 2: Fostering a Culture of Scholarly Teaching

HTLP also gave us the opportunity to cultivate a sustainable culture of scholarly teaching by creating a collegial and collaborative *space* in which to talk about our teaching as a community and by prioritizing a "scholarly teaching" *approach*. Scholarly teaching uses evidence of student learning (such as performance on assignments) and pedagogical research (such as SoTL) to assess the effectiveness of instructional practices and course design, allowing teachers to make changes to their pedagogy, where necessary, based on evidence and research rather than solely on impressions. Many of the Workshop & Discussion meetings featured history SoTL experts who shared their research with the department and led us through hands-on sessions. For instance, the historian David Pace introduced the department to the Decoding the Disciplines paradigm, a process he co-developed to help instructors identify the bottlenecks in, or obstacles to, student learning. Specifically, the paradigm helps expert scholars externalize and clarify discipline-specific mental moves that are obvious to them but remain elusive to the novices in their classrooms. Students may not know, for instance, that we read primary and secondary sources for different reasons. Students might read a primary source as uncomplicated factual information about a historical moment, while the expert would know the possibilities *as well as* the limitations of what a primary source can tell us about the past. In holding four Workshop & Discussion meetings over the course of HTLP's first year (2017–2018), we sought to normalize the practice of asking "what does the research say?" when reflecting on our instruction and course design.[6]

---

[6] On scholarly teaching, see Randy Bass, "The Scholarship of Teaching: What's the Problem?," *Inventio: Creative Thinking about Learning and Teaching,* 1 (Feb. 1999); and Pace, "Amateur in the Operating Room." David Pace, *The Decoding the Disciplines Paradigm: Seven Steps to Increased Student Learning* (Bloomington, 2017).

We had excellent attendance at all these Workshop & Discussion sessions, and, as with developing the SLOs, the voluntary nature of participation resulted in little grumbling about these events as added burdens on the faculty. We explained that the purpose of these sessions was to inspire and stimulate rather than prescribe or dictate, and we communicated throughout that we valued the autonomy that individual faculty enjoyed in their classrooms. Although not all faculty agreed with the experts' approaches, they uniformly engaged visiting scholars in good faith. This led to robust conversations and debates during these sessions, which, despite differences in perspective or approach, gave faculty a shared sense of commitment to teaching. Participants often expressed that these workshops validated work they were already doing in the classroom and provided new language (e.g., "alignment," "formative assessment") for talking with colleagues about their approaches. For all these reasons, we saw that the process of building this culture of scholarly teaching was as important as producing SLOs.

We fostered a culture of scholarly teaching in other ways as well. We created an internal Canvas site where members of the department could access history SoTL literature and share pedagogy resources. We also added a public-facing HTLP section on our departmental Web site that included a short history SoTL bibliography, publicized the talks of our invited expert guests, listed the working group membership, and shared the goals and methods we employed to develop our SLOs. Mendoza conducted two pedagogy workshops for graduate students in collaboration with the department's History Graduate Student Association, and our department has since added a graduate-level pedagogy course to our offerings. Finally, in year two of HTLP, the working group piloted a new tool to document our scholarly approach to teaching: the scholarly teaching memo, modeled on the course portfolio, a genre for presenting to the public one's intellectual approach to teaching and efforts to study and/or revise a particular course.[7]

Drawing upon the Decoding the Disciplines paradigm, working group members selected a course in which they experienced a persistent bottleneck in student learning. With Mendoza's guidance, they used history SoTL and other pedagogy research to learn more about the nature of the obstacle. Working group members understood that they were not searching for a panacea; rather, they were engaging in a focused inquiry to determine the best strategies for removing the obstacle to student learning in their course. Members decided how to incorporate these changes into their courses most efficiently, and they gathered evidence on the impact of these changes on student learning. They then reflected on their experiment and chose the appropriate next steps. Working group members prepared scholarly teaching memos to document their efforts and share them with the entire department during the final Workshop & Discussion meeting in the spring of 2019. As a genre for recording the practice of scholarly teaching, modeling the process, and presenting it publicly, the memos fostered collegial dialogue around pedagogy and SoTL.

---

[7] "History Teaching & Learning Project," 2019, *University of Colorado Boulder History Department,* https://www.colorado.edu/history/about/history-teaching-learning-project. Importantly, the course portfolio is *not* the same as a teaching portfolio that showcases syllabi and assignments. Instead, in making one's scholarly teaching public, course portfolios help generate, exchange, and build knowledge about teaching beyond the classroom. Pat Hutchings, ed., *The Course Portfolio: How Faculty Can Examine Their Teaching to Advance Practice and Improve Student Learning* (Washington, 1998); Daniel J. Bernstein, "Capturing the Intellectual Work of Teaching: The Benchmark Portfolio," in *Making Teaching and Learning Visible: Course Portfolios and the Peer Review of Teaching,* ed. Daniel Bernstein et al. (Boston, 2006), 23–43; Bass, "Scholarship of Teaching."

Implementation Goal 3: Working toward Curricular Revision

Creating the slos and fostering a culture of scholarly teaching was the bulk of our htlp work, and we were only able to take preliminary steps toward our third goal of updating and improving our undergraduate curriculum. During the second year, we began a conversation about curricular mapping, the process by which a department describes where in the curriculum its learning objectives are taught, mastered, and assessed. A curriculum map would help our department see clearly which topics and slos were being taught where and to which students (majors or nonmajors), and it would allow us to better understand structural problems in the major pathway. We were aware that we needed to rework our course sequencing because of historic oddities in our numbering system, but other issues arose as we thought more deliberately about the slos. For example, we pondered what role introductory classes should play. How might we balance broad content surveys with skill building? How might we both support majors at the beginning of their history learning and cater to the large number of nonmajors for whom an introductory survey might be the last history course they ever take? What was a 1000-level learning objective versus a learning objective at the 2000 level or the 4000 level? We were especially interested in using curriculum mapping to better assess student learning at the level of the major, but we failed to achieve the goal because we ran out of time during the formal, funded phase of htlp.[8]

Looking Ahead: Reviving and Sustaining the Momentum Created by htlp

Two years of htlp discussions prompted a simple but profound perspective shift: we began to look at ourselves through our students' eyes to see whether what we were doing was clear to them as they moved through our classes and the major. As the formal phase of htlp ended in the summer of 2019, the leadership reflected upon how to use the gains we had made to sustain pedagogical development in the department. Throughout the project, we knew that we needed to institutionalize our two years of intense work or it might be quickly lost. The working group was clearly essential to the work we had done, and so it remained in place as we entered the 2019–2020 academic year. Without an embedded expert once the uedp grant expired, we decided to pass the role of working group facilitator on to permanent faculty, with a different member rotating into the position each academic year. It was to become part of our regular service work, though we did continue to provide modest funding for volunteer participants. As we transitioned into this new period, our plans were to continue using the tools and practices that had served us well in creating slos and fostering a culture of scholarly teaching to begin work on our third goal of curricular revision. We also continued the Workshop & Discussion meetings in fall 2019, inviting Laura Westhoff to lead us through a conversation about reconfiguring the major pathway. Finally, we were given the remarkable opportunity to hire Mendoza as a tenure-track member of our department, a case built partly on her pedagogical expertise and her emerging leadership in history SoTL.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit, disrupting our plans. Like everyone else in academia, we shifted into survival mode. We found, however, that the time we had invested

---

[8] Erick Metzler et al., "The Aspirational Curriculum Map: A Diagnostic Model for Action-Oriented Program Review," *To Improve the Academy: A Journal of Educational Development,* 36 (June 2017), 156–67.

in htlp was vital for supporting each other as we transitioned to crisis-driven teaching in multiple modalities. As we faced the complexities of our new teaching reality, we returned to what had become a common practice in the previous two years: organizing regular Workshop & Discussion sessions (via Zoom, of course) to share effective instructional strategies.

Four years out from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are only now returning to curricular revision and reviving some of the key elements we had planned to sustain before the interruption. In 2023–2024, we restarted the working group with curricular revision at the top of its agenda, we will improve and circulate a public-facing slo graphic, and we will support new faculty in adding slos to their syllabi. We will also return to some of the insights offered by htlp-invited experts. Leah Shopkow, for instance, shared with Mendoza how her department at Indiana University went about mapping the curriculum, with impressive results, and during his visit, Calder shared with the working group his department's process of choosing individual slos to prioritize for assessment each year. Lastly, Westhoff's presentation on teaching historiographical mapping suggested the need to revisit the learning goals driving the cornerstone courses in our major. We also look forward to learning from other departments that have taken steps to revise their curricula.

Our htlp efforts also spilled out into several efforts related to revising our systems for evaluating teaching. We joined the Teaching Quality Framework (tqf) in 2018, an opt-in campus initiative with expert consultants guiding us in creating a new peer course evaluation protocol to replace perfunctory single-class observations. Our new process introduced a measure of standardization to class observations, including a form to guide classroom visits, a broader review of course materials by peer observers, instructor choice of evaluation criteria, and explicit opportunities for mentoring and collegial dialogue between observer and instructor. Our new peer observation protocol is another way to embed a culture of scholarly teaching into regular departmental practices. The College of Arts and Sciences developed its own Quality Teaching Initiative in 2021–2022, mandating that all departments develop measurable criteria to evaluate the teaching records of faculty who are up for reappointment, tenure, and promotion. Combining work from htlp and tqf, we developed and approved a clear and flexible rubric for faculty to understand our department's expectations and assessment of instructional practices. For instance, one expectation is that faculty will practice goal-oriented teaching that is, as our rubric states, "guided by clearly articulated learning goals, based on a curriculum designed to achieve those goals, and is actively responsive to various forms of feedback." We have provided faculty with descriptions of evidence that can demonstrate how well they are meeting this expectation and at what level (basic, meritorious, excellent).[9]

We also participated in a campus-wide pilot of new Student Evaluations of Teaching (sets), moving away from problematic omnibus questions or directives (e.g., "rate the instructor overall") and toward statements better suited to eliciting student perceptions

[9] "Tools for Teaching Evaluation: tqf Templates and Department Examples," 2023, *University of Colorado Boulder Teaching Quality Framework Initiative,* https://www.colorado.edu/teaching-quality-framework/tools-for -teaching-evaluation; *TEval: Transforming Higher Education: Multidimensional Evaluation of Teaching,* https://www .teval.net/; Gabriela C. Weaver et al., "Establishing a Better Approach for Evaluating Teaching: The TEval Project," *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning,* 52 (May 2020), 25–31; Sarah E. Andrews et al., "Transforming Teaching Evaluation in Disciplines: A Model and Case Study of Departmental Change," in *Transforming Institutions,* ed. White et al., 189–204. "Quality Teaching Initiative," 2023, *University of Colorado Boulder College of Arts and Sciences Faculty and Staff Site,* https://www.colorado.edu/asfacultystaff/personnel/faculty-resources/quality-teaching -initiative.

of and knowledge about their individual learning experience in the class and with the instructor (e.g., we now use a Likert scale to evaluate statements, such as "I was encouraged to reflect on what I was learning" and "the instructor explained the grading criteria for assignments"). The campus subsequently adopted a version of these new statements. We then used them to incorporate more self-reflection on teaching into our annual merit process. We now ask faculty to consider SET scores, student comments, and other forms of student feedback in reporting on their instructional efforts on their merit forms. In all these ways, HTLP proved beneficial beyond the immediate goals articulated in the proposal.

There are further possibilities for building on such a foundation, including incorporating scholarly teaching memos or course portfolios into reappointment, tenure, and promotion dossiers to document how faculty are engaging with history SoTL to improve their teaching. And as we prepare for program review in 2024–2025, we also will need to develop a plan for assessing student learning across the major that is rooted in our new SLOs. This might involve doing preassessments and postassessments in methods courses and capstone research seminars for majors, though we will need to have thorough discussions with the full faculty before settling on any particular approach to assessment. During the 2023–2024 academic year, the working group and other faculty are preparing for departmental conversations around assessment. The groundwork we laid during HTLP makes contemplating these future initiatives seem less daunting.

It is difficult to look back on HTLP, and the major investments of time and effort we made from 2016 to 2019, as just groundwork for the major tasks of curricular revision and assessment to come. We might have been able to move more quickly, but we learned that consensus building takes time and that it is worth the time it takes. Achieving our goals through consensus did not mean that all faculty members were equally enthusiastic about all aspects of HTLP (or related efforts). There were productive critiques of the methods the experts shared with us and debates over the wording of the SLOs. Some faculty chafed at too great an emphasis on marketable skills, while others questioned some of the tenets of SoTL research, such as the efficacy of active learning. There were also persistent concerns about instructor autonomy, particularly in conversations about our new peer course observation protocol. But we took the time to air different perspectives on these issues and develop SLOs that reflected the teaching approaches of each faculty member. In the end, the SLOs passed almost unanimously (with one abstention), and the peer course evaluation protocol passed with more than 80 percent of the vote (with one abstention and three "no" votes). The sustained discussions and iterative processes that gave our faculty a voice in and ownership of these documents eventually brought on board some who might have been initially unconvinced of the value of the project. And in a world of top-down attempts to impose assessment criteria, HTLP has allowed us to push forward—and sometimes push back—with our own self-defined and discipline-specific learning objectives and teaching protocols.

Other than moving more swiftly, what might we have done better? We could have done more to partner with our students. While we did bring graduate students into the working group and the Workshop & Discussion meetings, we could have developed more substantial ways for them to enter into the process. Direct input from undergraduates

would have been even more beneficial and is now a well-established best practice in SoTL inquiry. Many of our majors still wish for more help in articulating their hard-earned history skills for future employers. We owe them workshops and materials that seek undergraduate feedback on our slos, that translate them for our undergraduates, and that provide them with the ability to clearly articulate the knowledge and skills that they have gained as history majors.[10]

What the time spent laying the groundwork earned us, however, was a firm foundation for curricular change and myriad related efforts. Building on core SoTL research and evidence-based practices, tailoring them to our department's unique conditions, developing a culture of scholarly teaching, and engaging in democratic consensus building has provided a platform on which we can confidently pursue curricular change and related efforts. Establishing departmental slos has proved to be instrumental in responding to administrative initiatives and to our students' needs. After a pandemic hiatus, we now plan to use these htlp tools to revise our curriculum, map our major and minor pathways, and assess our learning objectives and student learning across the major. At a time when humanities disciplines are under siege by partisan cultural distrust and arguments about economic practicality, it is also imperative that we use these tools to help make the case for the value of history to our prospective and current students, to our institutional leaders, and to society more broadly.

---

[10] Alison Cook-Sather, Catherine Bovill, and Peter Felten, *Engaging Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching: A Guide for Faculty* (San Francisco, 2014); Mary T. Huber and Pat Hutchings, *The Advancement of Learning: Building the Teaching Commons* (San Francisco, 2005).