

WORLD HISTORY GE ASSESSMENT

2023-2024

Conducted by the Department of History. Chair: Dr. Alister Chapman, faculty members; Drs. Marianne Robins, Heather Keaney, Alastair Su.

In the 2023-24 academic year, the Department of History conducted assessment of student learning in relation to the GE World History SLO that reads as follows, *Students will acquire literacy in the histories of diverse people across the globe and reflect on the importance of world history for the Christian.*

In Fall 2023, History faculty each assigned the same short-essay question as part of our final exams. The question was: “Why is it important for Christians to study world history? Provide specific examples as part of your answer.” The department faculty We drew up a four-level rubric to assess what the students wrote, and marked student essays accordingly.

Dr. Chapman led this effort as chair; Dr. Keaney and Dr. Robins were also very involved. In Fall 2023, all three were teaching HIS10 Perspectives on World History—the one course on campus that satisfies the World History in Christian Perspective requirement. Dr. Ryan Minor was also teaching HIS10 in Fall 2023, but because his final exam did not include an essay component, we did not ask him to participate.

The analytical four-level rubric was used for assessment. The following table provides the raw results of this assessment.

World History rubric				
Category	Superior	Good	Fair	Inadequate
Understanding of the relationship between Christianity and global history	HIS10-1: 14 HIS10-3: 2 HIS10-4: 20 HIS10-6: 6	HIS10-1: 10 HIS-3: 10 HIS10-4: 7 HIS10-4: 17	HIS10-1: 2 HIS10-3: 12 HIS10-4: 3 HIS10-6: 8	HIS10-1: 0 HIS10-3: 1 HIS10-4: 0 HIS10-6: 1
Ability to provide historical examples to support argument	HIS10-1: 2 HIS10-3: 5 HIS10-4: 9 HIS10-6: 7	HIS10-1: 7 HIS10-3: 6 HIS10-4: 7 HIS10-6: 12	HIS10-1: 8 HIS10-3: 9 HIS10-4: 12 HIS10-6: 2	HIS10-1: 8 HIS10-3: 5 HIS10-4: 2 HIS10-6: 11

The results show that 76% of students showed a superior or good “understanding of the relationship between Christianity and global history, and 49% of students showed a superior or good “ability to provide historical examples to support [their] argument.”

The department faculty were pleased with the 76% who did a good or better job of explaining the relationship between Christianity and the study of history. This strongly suggests that they are accomplishing the GE outcome of “reflect[ing] on the importance of world history for the Christian.” It was especially pleasing that many students were able to make several connections on this score. Most commonly, students connected world history to Christian truths about creation, fall, and redemption; to theological ideas such as shalom and common grace; to creation care; to love of neighbor; to human beings created in the image of God; and to virtues such as humility and empathy.

The assessors did not include a measure of inter-rater reliability in this semester, in large part because of overlapping sabbaticals for two out of the three faculty involved in this assessment. However, the assessors did discuss the divergences in scores between the different sections. Part of the challenge for the first criterion especially was determining what merited a “point”—Dr. Chapman (who taught sections 1 and 4) was more satisfied with a student mentioning, say, that humanity is made in God’s image, while his more intellectually and theologically rigorous peers wanted more development of the idea before they counted it. This led to a fruitful discussion of what the bar should be for this course, in which we concluded that we should be grateful for even a rudimentary grasp of some of these concepts in an introductory course like this, while also pushing for more. The department faculty certainly hope that there is further development of these ideas in other courses that they take at Westmont.

According to assessment results, students were not as able to provide historical examples for the points that they made. The assessors are not sure why this was. It may have been a time issue in the exam—this question was just one short essay worth 10% of the exam, and so students may not have applied themselves to it as much as they might have. It may be that faculty teaching World History courses need to spend more time in class connecting specific parts of the historical narrative that each of their courses provide to specific virtues or theological points. Some of the challenge is that doing the latter could easily feel forced. Thankfully, the first part of the rubric—understanding the relationship between Christianity and history—which had the better scores, is the one at the core of the second half of the learning outcome that the History faculty were assessing this year--“Students will acquire literacy in the histories of diverse peoples across the globe and reflect on the importance of world history for the Christian.” The department did not set a benchmark before the assessment, but the department faculty were pleased with 76% of students were in the superior or good categories.

The following adjustment were discussed and implemented by faculty as closing-the-loop activities:

1. Dr. Robins is assigning Shirley Mullen's *The Courageous Middle*, with accompanying assignments and discussions, to help students think better about global and social engagement as Christians.
2. Dr. Keaney is going to emphasize the importance of note taking more, to ensure that students hold on to relevant theological-historical discussions from class.
3. Dr. Chapman is revising his HIS10 Perspectives class during his Spring 2025 sabbatical, and this will be a focus.
4. Dr. Robins is including an essay on the Christian liberal arts to her final exams.
5. History faculty are committed to continuing to find ways to incorporate this learning outcome into our classes in ways that connect it to the historical material (as has been our historic practice), rather than as stand-alone discussions.