

Guided Reflection, Fall 2003
HI 216F: Latin America since 1826 (The Struggle for Human Rights)
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Course GER Learning Objectives

This course fulfills the NCSU History GER (General Education Requirement) for a non-English speaking culture. “Each course in the history category of the GER will provide instruction and guidance that help students to:

1. understand and engage in the human experience through the interpretation of evidence from the past situated in geotemporal context; and
2. become aware of the act of historical interpretation itself, through which historians use varieties of evidence to offer perspectives on the meaning of the past; and
3. make academic arguments about history using reasons and evidence for supporting those reasons that are appropriate to the field of study.”

GER Conceptual/Content Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. analyze and explain the impact of major historical forces and events that shaped the region, with special attention to human right abuses and issues.
2. evaluate and critique primary and secondary historical sources, including those on the Internet.
3. organize and write logical historical essays, phrased in clear, active-voice prose, and supported by specific, appropriate evidence.

Means of Evaluating GER Student Learning Outcomes

Numbers in parentheses refer to the related learning outcomes listed above.

You will demonstrate your achievement of the above learning outcomes through:

1. **Speaking Assignments:**
 - a. A group research project, with oral presentations, on human rights issues, individuals, and case studies throughout Latin America (1-3) and current events reports based on the Latin American Press links above (2)
 - b. Instructor and student-led small-group and full-class discussions of written assignments, documentary films, music, historical artifacts, and other materials (1)

“Discussion requires us to engage with the material in a multisensory way, through interpersonal communication, verbal communication, and visual supplements. This type of environment requires verbal processing, a powerful way to learn for anyone. It is also an environment that reward creative thinking. In discussion you explicate information and answer questions, and you also have the opportunity to make creative connections with information from class notes, lectures, readings, and personal experiences” (*Learning Outside the Lines* by Jonathan Mooney and David Cole (2000, p. 114).

2. **Writing Assignments:**

- a. Critical annotated bibliographies of research materials for group projects, including the critical evaluation of web sites (part of group report, 2)
 - b. Longer (1200-1800 word) analytical essays (1-3)
 - c. Quizzes, including final quiz (1)
3. **Both Speaking and Writing:**
- a. One-page Thought Questions (TQs) and WebCT online discussions: Brief 250 word written responses to specific questions based on historical documents. You will engage in role playing in some questions, taking on the character of a historical figure. (1-3)
 - b. In-class editing, critique, revision, and discussion of writing assignments (part of participation, 2)

Assessment Findings

The course, a CHASS First-Year Seminar, had 19 students. I've taught this course regularly since 1980. Students complete a variety of formal and informal writing and speaking assignments.

My formal assessment technique compared the first and third longer essays (1400 words) completed by students. I sampled every fourth student's essays. Assessment for each essay is based on the following four rubric areas. Students receive an extensive explanation, with examples, of each rubric area:

- Area 1: Focus, Content, Ideas, Analysis, Interpretation
- Area 2: Inclusion of Relevant, Specific Historical Evidence
- Area 3: Organization and Logic
- Area 4: Writing Clarity and Correctness

The results appear below. Four of five students showed improvements from the first to the third essay, ranging from four to thirty-three percent. One student's scores declined a total of sixteen percent. Overall, the class average improved seven percent. Notice that all students except #1 began at the B or B- level, leaving relatively little room for percentage improvement. Furthermore, I deduct rubric points more stringently on each successive essay. Thus on essay 1, I marked but did not deduct for writing and grammatical errors, including overuse of the passive voice. By the third essay, students could lose up to ten points for such writing lapses. Four of the five students progressed steadily.

Additional measures: Students presented three brief current events oral reports and a ten-minute group oral report. I observed increased confidence and fluency among most students as the semester progressed. Likewise, with two exceptions, initially quiet students participated more frequently in class discussions as the semester progressed. Overall, 8 students earned course grades of A, 8 Bs, and 3 Cs.

	Essay 1	Essay 2	Essay 3	% Change	Final Average
Student 1	70	83	93	+33	81.6
Student 2	80	83	88	+10	88.4
Student 3	89	83	93	+4	90.5

Student 4	87	80	73	-16	78.8
Student 5	85	90	95	+12	94.2
AVERAGE	82	84	88	+7	

Summary of Findings by Outcome

Outcome 1: I focused particularly on the longer essays and class discussions for my overall assessment of this outcome. I found that 17 out of the 19 students improved substantially through the course in both means of assessment.

Outcome 2: For this outcome I observed students' ability to evaluate historical sources in their oral presentations, their annotated bibliographies, and in-class critiques. The students showed some improvement but I was not satisfied with their abilities in this area, especially in regard to Internet sources.

Outcome 3: Students' long analytical essays improved substantially through the semester in 17 of the 19 students.

Projected Changes to Course Based on Assessment

Because I am satisfied with students' learning related to outcomes 1 and 3, I will continue to use the extensive resources I dedicate to these outcomes. Outcome 2 represents a problem. I realize that my expectations for my students (all first-semester freshmen) ~~were was~~ higher than they are likely to achieve. Indeed, junior and senior history majors have difficulty evaluating historical sources. One option, then, would be to change the outcome so that it expresses a more realistic expectation. However, I prefer to keep it as it as a goal. The ability to discriminate among sources is a core competency in the study of history; even a course taught for freshmen should maintain it as a goal. At a minimum, students should develop an awareness of the different levels of credibility and value of sources.

My experience in this course, particularly in teaching freshmen, has led to other changes for future classes. I found that my students made greater progress in their writing than in their speaking. Thus, I plan to reduce the number of writing assignments and to substitute instead more classroom discussion. I also found that students on this level require more instruction in basic college skills. I will focus on basic research and learning-skills, such as using electronic research tools and note-taking.