

## Evaluating the “Professionalizing History Majors” Course: Historical Knowledge and Co-Curricular Activities

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WHAT ARE HISTORY MAJORS learning at colleges and universities in the United States? This question is increasingly asked by educators, legislators, and other segments of the general public in discussions related to evaluating history as an academic subject specifically, and higher education degrees in general. While no consensus on the answer currently exists, various individuals and groups have taken up the task of not just trying to decipher what history majors learn, but also how they are equipped to apply what they learn outside of academia.<sup>1</sup> Irrespective of the motivations of those seeking clarity in this regard, the question itself is important to a variety of constituencies and appears to be a prominent topic of debate well into the future. But how does one evaluate the history major? What evidence should be used? Perhaps more important, what do history majors themselves think? In the Spring 2016 semester, the University of Central Florida (UCF) History Department attempted to provide some answers to these questions by offering a course, titled “History Majors in Society and Careers” (later renamed as “Professionalizing History Majors”).<sup>2</sup> Since then, the course has been offered most Fall and Spring semesters at UCF in

a face-to-face format. Student reflections on their understandings of history and the history profession gleaned from course assessments during the first three semesters it was offered reveal that, while history majors understand much about both the discipline and its practitioners and are involved in co-curricular activities to enhance their knowledge, learning gaps remain, partially as a result of the economic realities faced by many undergraduates.

Designed for students pursuing a B.A. degree, the course's purpose is best illustrated by the following syllabus statement:

The goal of this course is to enhance History majors' understanding of the opportunities they will encounter in both modern society and their post-graduation careers. Primary emphasis will be placed on the role of History professionals in civic life and workplace endeavors by familiarizing students with the transferable skills they will learn as History majors. In addition, students in this course will learn how to better articulate for different post-graduation audiences the abilities and knowledge they have obtained as History majors. Overall, this course is designed to help History Majors better understand their chosen discipline and how it will prepare them for life after UCF.<sup>3</sup>

Accordingly, the course functions as an introduction to basic historiography and discipline mechanics, broadly conceived, as well as a professional development primer similar in design to offerings for applied disciplines at UCF and other universities. Enrolled students learn about the various skills they are acquiring as history majors, familiarize themselves with the best ways to articulate their discipline-related knowledge to others outside of the major, and enhance their exposure to the lives of history professionals both inside and outside of the academy. Students in the course are assessed conventionally through quizzes, discussion postings, reflection papers, and e-portfolios. They also are evaluated in their ability to convey their rationales, skills, and goals as history majors through interviews (labeled "elevator speeches") to faculty and course Advisory Board members outside of class. Students receive in-class presentations (by the instructor and guest speakers) on the following themes:

- Self-Assessment: Skills, Goals, Opportunities
- Academic Historians and Historiography
- Public Historians and Non-Academic History
- History Majors and Non-History Careers

- Transferrable Skills: Understanding and Articulating Them
- History Majors and Civic Life
- Experiential Learning and Internships<sup>4</sup>

Ideally, by the conclusion of the course, enrolled students have a greater understanding of what the history major offers them and how they need to communicate what they are learning in order to become effective history professionals upon graduation, regardless of the career or civic engagement path they follow.

In addition to the traditional assessment tools used to evaluate individual student performance on specific assignments, the instructor employs other measures to evaluate the broader, collective impact of the course on those enrolled in a more comprehensive sense. These measures stem from two key influences on the course’s development: UCF’s current Quality Enhancement Project (QEP), titled “What’s Next: Integrative Learning for Professional and Civic Preparation,” and the Tuning Project by the American Historical Association (AHA). Initiated as part of the university’s re-accreditation process, the “What’s Next” program focuses on better preparing UCF students in all disciplines for the professional opportunities they will encounter upon graduation. This process centers on integrative learning where students are encouraged to begin planning their post-graduation goals early in their academic careers, focus on how the skills they are learning will transfer to off-campus jobs and civic engagement endeavors, and “advocate for themselves in their lives beyond the university.”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, yet more discipline-targeted, the AHA’s Tuning Project is an effort “to articulate the core of historical study and to identify what a student should understand and be able to do at the completion of a history degree program.” In 2012, as part of this project, an initial cohort of sixty-five history educators from colleges and universities around the country agreed to collaborate in formulating core objectives, in the process clarifying the skills that recipients of a history degree can use “in terms of personal development, civic engagement, and career potential.”<sup>6</sup> The Tuning Project continues to exist today primarily in the core competencies and student learning outcomes crafted by project participants that are used for curriculum development by numerous history programs across the United States.<sup>7</sup>

The instructor of “History Majors in Society and Careers/ Professionalizing History Majors” crafted pre- and post-tests/surveys

for enrolled students to complete as a means of assessing what they understood about the history profession and career preparation before and after taking the course. Except for three additional free-response questions included on the post-test/survey, both versions contained identical questions and answer options. The questions were derived in part from an evaluative tool used by the “What’s Next” QEP team, titled “First Destination Survey,” that was designed to obtain information about graduating students’ “employment plans, career fields, job location, employers, salary and other plans such as graduate or professional education.”<sup>8</sup> The tests/surveys also included questions directly incorporating information from the AHA Tuning Project’s 2013 “History Discipline Core” that provided desired core competencies and learning outcomes for “History students.”<sup>9</sup> A few questions also closely resembled those used by Mary Jo Festle in the AHA *Perspectives on History* article, “How They Change: Students Tell Us How History Transforms Them.”<sup>10</sup>

The pre-tests/surveys are administered to students prior to any content being covered in the first class meeting of each semester and the post-tests/surveys are administered during the designated final exam period for the course. Pre-tests/surveys are not graded or returned to students and the results are not addressed specifically in class discussions. The data addressed below is the result of pre- and post-tests/surveys taken by approximately forty-two students who enrolled in and completed a “History Majors in Society and Careers/ Professionalizing History Majors” section during the Spring 2016, Fall 2016, or Spring 2017 semesters. Not all data acquired from the tests/surveys is covered below; only those questions that specifically deal with student understanding of the history profession and its goals or questions that focus on student co-curricular activities are included in this analysis. All students completing the tests/surveys were officially designated history majors, though they represented most undergraduate levels (sophomore, junior, senior), women and men, and various ethnicities.

### **What History Professionals Do—Test/Survey Responses**

One question many college and university teachers of history debate is when the subject of historiography should be introduced to students. Viewpoints differ on this subject and range from the

**Table 1: Question 1: What is “historiography”?**

Answer Option	Pre-Test	% of Total Answers	Post-Test	% of Total Answers	% Change
A. The study of history and biography	3	7%	4	10%	3%
<b>B. The study of history interpretations</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>17%</b>
C. The study of history and geography	4	10%	0	0%	-10%
D. The study of history facts	5	12%	1	2%	-10%

belief that understanding historiography is better suited to graduate students, to the belief that historiography should be introduced in general education courses, or earlier, and progressively covered in greater detail in upper-division history major courses.<sup>11</sup> As noted above, students enrolled in “History Majors in Society and Careers/Professionalizing History Majors” receive specific instruction in what historiography is, primarily through targeted assigned readings and course discussions, as well as an overview lecture on the topic presented by a guest speaker who typically is known as the “historiography guru” of the department. While not the focus of the course, historiography is one of the first subjects introduced to students, and references to it persist throughout the semester on a regular basis.

The first question for the pre- and post-tests/surveys simply stated, “What is ‘historiography’?” followed by four answer options. Student response statistics to Question 1 are available in **Table 1**, with the correct answer in bold. Noteworthy in student responses is the number of history majors who identified the correct answer prior to the topic being discussed in class (71%). This percentage indicates that, despite faculty disagreements about when to introduce the concept of historiography to students, well over half the students have become familiar with the term in some capacity through their general education history surveys, their upper-division major courses, or through non-course means inside or outside of their university curriculum. Moreover,

**Table 2: Question 2: Which of the following best characterizes what History Majors and Professional Historians do?**

Answer Option*	Pre-Test	% of Total Answers	Post-Test	% of Total Answers	% Change
<b>A. Engage in historical inquiry, research, and analysis</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>98%</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2%</b>
B. Engage in predictions about future societies based on the past	0	0%	0	0%	0%
C. Engage in crafting historical rationales for nation-state patriotism	0	0%	0	0%	0%
D. None of the above	0	0%	0	0%	0%
* <i>One pre-test taker answered "A, B, C"</i>	1	2%	0	0%	-2%

regardless of how enrolled students gained their understanding of historiography's definition, by the end of the course, almost 90% appeared to understand the concept, representing a 17 percentage point increase of collective student understanding by semester's end. In short, despite knowledge of historiography not being a specific goal of the course, coverage of the topic in the course resulted in an increase in student knowledge.

Other questions centered directly on the Tuning Project's core competencies and learning outcomes. The next six questions each asked, "Which of the following best characterizes what History Majors and Professional Historians do?" with three different answer options for each question (though all had "None of the above" as a fourth answer option as well). Student response statistics for the first question structured in this manner (Question 2) are available in **Table 2**, with the correct answer in bold. Of all the questions asked on the survey, students collectively answered Question 2 correctly more than the others. According to the survey results, the vast majority of students entering the course understood that of the options provided, historical inquiry, research, and analysis best

**Table 3: Question 3: Which of the following best characterizes what History Majors and Professional Historians do?**

Answer Option*	Pre-Test	% of Total Answers	Post-Test	% of Total Answers	% Change
A. Practice historical objectivity	39	93%	13	31%	-62%
<b>B. Practice historical empathy</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>67%</b>
C. Practice historical punditry	0	0%	0	0%	0%
D. None of the above	3	7%	0	0%	-7%
*One post-test taker answered “A, B”	0	0%	1	2%	2%

reflected what history majors and history professionals do. The most noteworthy insight from these statistics is that a basic premise of the history profession is widely understood by those majoring in history, indicating that K-12 teachers, college/university instructors, and/or other resources are doing an outstanding job conveying this message. Alternately, some may view these statistics as a rationale for de-emphasizing the Tuning Project’s focus on engaging in historical inquiry, research, and analysis as a core competency/learning outcome or spending less time on the concept in history major instruction.

The next question, also asking “Which of the following best characterizes what History Majors and Professional Historians do?” (Question 3), had less student consensus in answers and highlighted two of the most problematic concepts teachers encounter when introducing historical methodology to students: empathy and objectivity. Student response statistics for Question 3 are available in **Table 3**, with the correct answer in bold. Clearly, enrolled students had little familiarity with the notion of historical empathy prior to taking this course, or simply rejected the idea as relevant to understanding the past. In contrast, many of the students believed that historical objectivity plays a central role in what history majors and history professionals do. By the conclusion of

**Table 4: Question 4: Which of the following best characterizes what History Majors and Professional Historians do?**

Answer Option*	Pre-Test	% of Total Answers	Post-Test	% of Total Answers	% Change
A. Understand the unchanging nature of historical truth	2	5%	0	0%	-5%
<b>B. Understand the complex nature of the historical record</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>95%</b>	<b>16%</b>
C. Understand the static nature of historical evidence	4	10%	0	0%	-10%
D. None of the above	2	5%	1	2%	-3%
<i>*One pre-test taker and one post-test taker answered "A, B, C"</i>	1	2%	1	2%	0%

the course, a significant majority agreed with the Tuning Project objective regarding empathy, but a sizeable minority continued to support objectivity over empathy as the best answer to the question. Interestingly, and anecdotally, over the semester as students and the instructor engaged in many discussions about the meanings of empathy and objectivity, students appeared to become more comfortable with the former and applied the term more frequently in their interpretations of historiography and historical analysis. On the other hand, when the instructor delivered content centered on the idea of objectivity being an aspiration rather than certainty in historical research, students tended to challenge the argument and preferred making the case that “good” historians were objective in their work in contrast to “bad” historians who were not. Regardless, the statistics above indicate that teachers of history who agree with the Tuning Project’s highlighting of empathy need to do a better job explaining the concept to history majors.

Question 4 again asked “Which of the following best characterizes what History Majors and Professional Historians

do?” and dealt primarily with the goal of research in terms of historical understanding. Specifically, this question focused on how students regard conceptualizations of historical truth and evidence. Student response statistics for Question 4 are available in **Table 4**, with the correct answer in bold. Responses to Question 4 indicate that prior to instruction in this course, students had a good grasp of history as a dynamic topic in terms of historical evidence itself and how this evidence is used to create understandings of the past. It also appears that students rejected simplistic renderings of history and recognize that interpretations and the factors that condition them involve complicated variables rather than black-and-white generalizations. By the end of the course, 95% of students enrolled realized this conclusion, perhaps based on assigned readings or class discussions. Also of note here are student responses in terms of the idea of an unchanging historical truth.<sup>12</sup> Despite fears among some teachers and others that students confuse notions of empirically based conclusions and emotionally based understandings of truth, the numbers indicate that only a smattering of those surveyed equated the two, and by the course’s conclusion, none of those surveyed prioritized the quest for truth over understanding historical complexity in regards to what history majors or history professionals do.

A similar scenario resulted from the Question 5, again asking “Which of the following best characterizes what History Majors and Professional Historians do?” In this instance, students had to choose answers dealing with historians’ questions and conclusions. Student response statistics for Question 5 are available in **Table 5**, with the correct answer in bold. Again, students largely seemed to meet the Tuning Project’s expectations of history student knowledge at institutions of higher learning. Before being introduced to course content, well over three-quarters of those surveyed reasoned correctly that history majors and history professionals generated open-ended questions about the past and devised research strategies to answer them, rather than create celebratory or dogmatic conclusions about the past. These numbers indicate that the students surveyed realized that historians should not be dedicated to interpreting the past to glorify people or entities, and should be open to factors that may change their interpretations over time. That said, it should also

**Table 5: Question 5: Which of the following best characterizes what History Majors and Professional Historians do?**

Answer Option*	Pre-Test	% of Total Answers	Post-Test	% of Total Answers	% Change
<b>A. Generate significant, open-ended questions about the past and devise research strategies to answer them</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>12%</b>
B. Generate exceptional, celebratory conclusions about the past and devise research strategies to explain them	2	5%	1	2%	-3%
C. Generate important, dogmatic assessments about the past and devise research strategies to validate them	5	12%	0	0%	-12%
D. None of the above	1	2%	1	2%	0%
*One post-test taker answered "A, B, C"	0	0%	1	2%	2%

be noted that responses on the collective post-tests/surveys show that not all students agreed with these conclusions, even after a semester in which significant course content and class discussions reinforced the idea.

Question 6 also asked "Which of the following best characterizes what History Majors and Professional Historians do?" and attempted to gauge student understandings of what history majors and history professionals strive to do for the audiences they serve. Student response statistics for Question 6 are available in **Table 6**, with the correct answer in bold. Once more, students appeared to possess an understanding of the desired objective of history education prior to being exposed to course content. In this case, over 80% believed that crafting historical narrative and argument took priority for history majors and history professionals over

**Table 6: Question 6: Which of the following best characterizes what History Majors and Professional Historians do?**

Answer Option*	Pre-Test	% of Total Answers	Post-Test	% of Total Answers	% Change
<b>A. Craft historical narrative and argument</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>2%</b>
B. Craft new explanations for old problems	2	5%	1	2%	-3%
C. Craft usable pasts for non-traditional audiences	1	2%	1	2%	0%
D. None of the above	2	5%	4	10%	5%
<i>*One pre-test taker answered “A, B, C”</i>	1	2%	0	0%	-2%
<i>*One post-test taker answered “A, B, C”</i>	0	0%	1	2%	2%
<i>*One pre-test taker answered “A, B”</i>	1	2%	0	0%	-2%
<i>*One pre-test taker answered “B, C”</i>	1	2%	0	0%	-2%

resolving old “problems” or creating usable pasts for specific audiences. Of note, however, a small number of students seemed to believe that more than one of the answer options served as appropriate responses, despite the test/survey instructions stating they should only choose one answer; this may indicate that each of the options appeared to be appropriate answers to the question for some test/survey takers. In addition, proponents of historians teaching and interpreting history as usable pasts may find student answers to these questions troubling, as only a small number appeared to support that idea, though reservations about “non-traditional audiences” and confusion over the meaning of the term “usable pasts” may have played a role as well.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 7: Question 7: Which of the following best characterizes what History Majors and Professional Historians do?**

Answer Option*	Pre-Test	% of Total Answers	Post-Test	% of Total Answers	% Change
<b>A. Practice historical thinking as central to engaged citizenship</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>57%</b>
B. Practice historical thinking as central to societal stability	16	38%	4	10%	-28%
C. Practice historical thinking as central to organizational leadership	1	2%	2	5%	3%
D. None of the above	12	29%	1	2%	-27%
<i>*Two pre-test takers answered "A, B, C"</i>	2	5%	0	0%	-5%
<i>*One pre-test taker and one post-test taker did not provide an answer</i>	1	2%	1	2%	0%
<i>*One pre-test taker answered "A, C"</i>	1	2%	0	0%	-2%
<i>*One post-test taker answered "A, B"</i>	0	0%	1	2%	2%

Question 7, the final question in the category asking “Which of the following best characterizes what History Majors and Professional Historians do?” attempted to gauge student perspectives on the importance of historical thinking. In short, students were asked to prioritize the broader implications of teaching or encouraging historical thinking for history majors and history professionals. Student response statistics for Question 7 are available in **Table 7**, with the correct answer in bold. Answers to Question 7 demonstrate that history majors taking the course had varied views of why historical thinking is important. The majority of answers to the pre-test/survey question, though only a plurality, supported the idea

that historical thinking is central to societal stability. The Tuning Project’s desired core competency, that historical thinking is central to engaged citizenship, only received slightly more than 20% of the selected answers, while a greater number (more than a quarter of test/survey takers) marked “None of the above” in their responses. By the conclusion of the course, post-test/survey answers show a change in student understanding, but not wholesale consensus. While the number of students who chose “None of the above” and “societal stability” declined significantly, less than 80% believed the correct answer to be “engaged citizenship,” despite the fact that multiple course readings and class discussions emphasized this point. Resistance to the engaged citizenship answer may have stemmed from confusion over the terminology used in the answers, though it is also worth pointing out that the number of those choosing “organizational leadership” slightly increased overall from the pre-test/survey to the post-test/survey.

### **Co-Curricular Activities—Test/Survey Responses**

The Tuning Project, the “What’s Next” QEP project, and active learning advocates for both history majors and higher education in general have focused in part on co-curricular learning, or learning outside of the classroom via organized participation in activities that enable application of knowledge and skills learned in academic settings, to enhance students’ knowledge and competencies.<sup>14</sup> For history majors, co-curricular learning may involve a variety of tasks, from internships and service learning experiences, to membership in honor societies, to participation in scholarly events. The key is to get students to utilize what they are learning in as many forums as possible to better prepare them for their professional history worlds after graduation. “History Majors in Society and Careers/Professionalizing History Majors” was created, in part, to expose enrolled students to the various ways they could enhance their academic careers and post-graduation prospects via co-curricular experiences.

In order to assess the impact of the course and the history major in general on students in this regard, a prompt on participation in various activities was included in Question 16 on the pre- and post-tests/surveys: “Select the activities in which you were engaged during your time at UCF. (Select all that apply).” Due to the number of answer

**Question 16: Select the activities in which you were engaged during your time at UCF. (Select all that apply)**

- A. Participated in organizations related to major
- B. Participated in professional organizations
- C. Participated in community service or volunteer work
- D. Participated in Student Government Association (SGA)
- E. Participated in the Student Alumni Association - 4EVER KNIGHTS
- F. Participated in an SGA-Funded Agency (CAB, Homecoming, MSC, VUCF, etc.)
- G. Studied Abroad
- H. Other UCF clubs and organizations
- I. Joined an honorary society
- J. Held a leadership position in a student organization or SGA
- K. Presented, defended, published, performed, or exhibited a formal research project
- L. Served in a Peer Leader role (Resident Assistant, O-Teamer, Peer Involvement Counselor, Intramural Official, etc.)
- M. Participated in a research project with a faculty mentor for one or more semesters such as a capstone thesis project, independent research, or a similar opportunity
- N. Joined a fraternity or sorority
- O. Employed part-time on campus
- P. Played in a sport club
- Q. Employed full-time on campus
- R. Participated in intramural sports
- S. Employed part-time off campus
- T. Completed an internship, field experience, or clinical assignment
- U. Employed full-time off campus
- V. Completed a co-op (Cooperative Education)
- W. Other:

*Please specify:* \_\_\_\_\_

**Figure 1:** Question 16 for the Pre- and Post-Tests/Surveys

**Table 8: Question 16: Select the activities in which you were engaged during your time at UCF. (Select all that apply)**

Pre-Test/Survey (No. of Responses)	Post-Test/Survey (No. of Responses)	No. of Changes from Pre- to Post-Test/Survey
Participated in organizations related to major (12)	Participated in organizations related to major (20)	8
Participated in professional organizations (2)	Participated in professional organizations (5)	3
Joined an honorary society (12)	Joined an honorary society (15)	3
Employed part-time <u>off</u> campus (20)	Employed part-time <u>off</u> campus (23)	3

options provided (see **Figure 1**), student responses varied in the type and number of answers chosen. Nevertheless, certain patterns can be detected in the collective answers of survey takers. For example, the answers receiving the highest number of responses on the pre- and post-tests/surveys reveal student co-curricular involvement both before and after they enrolled in the course. In this regard, student response statistics for Question 16 are available in **Table 8**. The greatest change in student responses took place in relation to participation in organizations connected to the major. Though the answers do not provide specifics in terms of the organizations and their relationship to history, anecdotal evidence based on discussions in class indicate that students referred to membership in Phi Alpha Theta (the history honor society) and outside of class attendance at on-campus history lectures or other events.<sup>15</sup> These statistics also indicate an overall increase from the beginning to the end of the course of students participating in professional organizations (type unknown), honor societies (also reflecting a potential overlap with the “organizations related to major” answer), and off-campus employment. Aside from the last category, the increase in student activities reflected in the data indicates that a key goal of “History Majors in Society and Careers/Professionalizing History Majors” was achieved, at least for some enrolled students.

**Table 9: Question 16: Select the activities in which you were engaged during your time at UCF. (Select all that apply)**

Pre-Test/Survey (No. of Responses)	Post-Test/Survey (No. of Responses)
Employed part-time <u>off</u> campus (20)	Employed part-time <u>off</u> campus (23)
Participated in community service or volunteer work (15)	Participated in organizations related to major (20)
Participated in organizations related to major (12)	Participated in community service or volunteer work (15)
Joined an honorary society (12)	Joined an honorary society (15)
Other UCF clubs and organizations (10)	Other UCF clubs and organizations (12)

Another way of understanding the impact of the course on student co-curricular activities can be gleaned from the number of activities students indicated participation in based on their answers to Question 16. In other words, what answers did enrolled students select the most and how did this change from the beginning to the end of the semester? In this regard, student response statistics for the prompt in Question 16 are available in **Table 9**. The number one answer for both pre- and post-test/survey takers was employment part-time off campus, an unfortunate reality teachers increasingly face at public institutions similar in enrollment to UCF. Related to this course specifically, the number of students who indicated part-time work off campus actually increased over semester. These numbers should help college and university teachers realize that many of their students' opportunities to address academic assignments, not to mention their ability to spend time on discipline-related conceptualization, are conditioned by this situation. On a happier note, the numbers above indicate that relatively high student participation in community service/volunteer work, honor societies, organizations related to history, and other UCF clubs and organizations prior to enrollment in the course continued or expanded by the conclusion of the course. So, regardless of limitations perhaps imposed by off-campus work responsibilities, students collectively are increasingly engaging in co-curricular activities and thereby enhancing their discipline-related experiences outside of the classroom.

## Understandings of History—Open Question Responses

In addition to the multiple-choice questions included on the tests/surveys, students in “History Majors in Society and Careers/Professionalizing History Majors” had the opportunity to craft their own answers to certain prompts. Responses to these open questions provide another window into what students believed they learned in the course specifically, and as history majors in general. Student responses to these questions indicate a variety of viewpoints about what was being learned. The following answers, however, illustrate the dominant patterns in student answers across the three semesters that the course has been offered up to that point. For the most part, the quotations below have not been edited for readability in order to preserve the “voice” of the writers.

One of the open questions asked students, “How has your understanding of ‘what history is’ changed during your studies as UCF?” A student from the Spring 2017 class answered:

I think it has helped better explain “what history is.” I don’t believe it has changed what my understanding is. I’ve always know[n] what history is but now I can show and tell people.

The interaction of historians with non-historians appeared in other comments as well. One student from the Fall 2016 course section asserted:

My understanding of “what history is” has changed to incorporate public engagement. I previously didn’t realize the extent of how historians interact with each other and the public. Now, I understand this and wish to participate in the process.

A classmate took a different angle and focused on one of the concepts covered in the course, answering:

Originally many people view History as remembering random facts. However, studying history at the advance[d] level has shown me History is about having empathy for multiple situations.

Students from the inaugural course offering in Spring 2016 had similar perspectives, though at times emphasized different issues. The take away of one student addressed skills and the job market:

[T]he lessons and skills I learned can also be applied to many jobs outside of the history field.

Another student from that semester encapsulated the tone of many student answers to the question:

My understanding of “what history is” has changed during my studies at UCF in the sense that I now recognize the many different roles that historians play in society and local communities. At first, I thought that I should go in to academia after graduation because that was the most promising job (that was secure) for a History major. However, I now understand—and explain to people—that historians have very diverse options after graduation.

The second open question, this one specifically applying to the “History Majors in Society and Careers/Professionalizing History Majors” course only, asked students, “What, if anything, in this course helped change your understanding of Historians and History?” One student from the Spring 2017 cohort answered:

It showed a broader market and possibilities of what a Historian can do post degree. I wish I had known of this class sooner.

Another from the same class section responded:

This course has me think more about what I can do with my history degree and what I can specialize in. I used to just think I had very little option wise to use my degree, but now I realize I can do a lot more with my degree than I had originally realized.

A third from the cohort succinctly stated:

There is more to being a historian than teaching history.

Another student from that semester seemed to share the previous viewpoint, offering:

I only thought I could teach but with this course I have looked at other job opportunities in writing, publishing, museum work, history consulting, archival, etc.

A test/survey taker from the Fall 2016 section highlighted skills rather than careers, remarking:

This course helped me realize that in order to succeed in this field, professional skills as well as academic skills help benefit historians.

Another from the cohort, echoing previous comments, emphasized approaches to history:

It helped me to discover my historical philosophy which helped me to appreciate historical empathy and become a little more open minded.

A third from this group contended:

This course has really introduced me to history as a discipline and active endeavor with the community, rather than simply an area of interest. This course also helped me develop my own philosophy about history.

Students from the Spring 2016 cohort held comparable views:

[The course] has given me a broader understanding of the requirements, expectations, and possibilities my major presents.

A classmate opined:

This course taught me how to articulate my skills. I also learned that being an academic historian isn’t the only career option we have. In this class I learned about the importance of civic engagement, professionalizing ourselves and marketing myself as flexible.

Career directions emerged as a common theme, with one student from the Spring 2016 section writing:

It allowed me to re-examine and rethink what I want to do in terms of career. It has opened me to see outside of academia and see other possibilities, such as corporate world and use my skills in other areas in my community.

Another from the same group noted an overlooked reality in terms of history majors and their career choices:

Even if I don’t work in the field, I’ll always be a historian & be able to use my skills to my benefit.

### **Conclusions**

Much additional research should be done to better address what history majors learn and how they apply what they learn in careers and civic engagement after graduation from colleges and universities. The “History Majors in Society and Careers/ Professionalizing History Majors” course and the related data evaluated above offer some food for thought as the process of determining answers continues. Overall, history majors taking the course understood historiography and Tuning Project competencies central to historians’ work, such as engaging in historical inquiry, research and analysis, understanding the complex nature of the historical record, generating significant open-ended questions

about the past and devising research strategies to answer them, and crafting historical narrative and argument prior to being exposed to course content. On the other hand, some students at both the beginning and ending of the course lacked clarity when it came to the role of objectivity and empathy in a historian's work and the role of history in terms of engaged citizenship. Regarding co-curricular activities as a means of enhancing and applying their knowledge and history-related skill sets outside of the classroom, students entering the classroom had ample experience with honor societies, history-oriented organizations and other clubs on campus, and community service activities. Yet based on their responses, the principal systematic activity that students participated in outside of the classroom was non-history-related employment. In terms of the course itself, students expressed that they did learn much about what being a history professional means and expanded their viewpoints on their career and civic engagement options upon graduation. Thus, while this course may not be suitable for all history programs in institutions of higher learning, manifestations of it in different forms may be of use to some as another way of engaging the ongoing questions of "Why be a history major?" and "What will you do with the skills learned as a history major once the degree is completed?"

## Notes

1. For a recent overview of these debates, see Lendol Calder and Tracy Steffes, “Measuring College Learning in History,” in *Improving Quality in Higher Education: Learning Outcomes and Assessments for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Richard Arum, Josipa Roksa, and Amanda Cook (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 37-86; and David Pace, “The History Classroom in an Era of Crisis,” *Perspectives on History* 55, no. 5 (May 2017): 17-18.
2. After the third offering of the course, the Department of History changed the title to “Professionalizing History Majors.”
3. Daniel Murphree (instructor), “HIS 3930 – History Majors in Society and Careers,” Syllabus, 1.
4. Murphree, “HIS 3930,” 8-14.
5. University of Central Florida, “What’s Next: About,” <<https://undergrad.ucf.edu/whatsnext/about/mission/>>.
6. Julia Brookins, “Nationwide Tuning Project for Undergraduate History Programs Launched,” *Perspectives on History* 50, no. 3 (March 2012): 14; Julia Brookins, “The Tuning Project’s Summer Meeting,” *Perspectives on History* 50, no. 6 (September 2012): 23. The author participated as a faculty member in the 2014-2015 iteration of the Tuning Project.
7. American Historical Association, “Tuning the History Discipline in the United States,” <<https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/tuning-the-history-discipline>>.
8. University of Central Florida, Career Services, “First Destination Survey Student FAQ,” <<https://career.ucf.edu/resources/first-destination-survey/student-faq/>>.
9. American Historical Association, “AHA History Tuning Project: 2013 History Discipline Core,” <<https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/tuning-the-history-discipline/2013-history-discipline-core>>.
10. Mary Jo Festle, “How They Change: Students Tell Us How History Transforms Them,” *Perspectives on History* 53, no. 6 (December 2015): 30-31.
11. For a sampling of these arguments, see Jeremy Black, *Historiography: Contesting the Past, Claiming the Future* (London, United Kingdom: Social Affairs Unit, 2011); Paul Hibbeln, “Introducing Students to Historiography in the AP European History Classroom,” AP Central, <<https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/courses/ap-european-history/classroom-resources/introducing-students-historiography>>; Caroline Hoefflerle, “Teaching Historiography to High School and Undergraduate Students,” *OAH Magazine of History* 21, no. 2 (April 2007): 40-44; Patrick Rael, “What Happened and Why? Helping Students Read and Write Like Historians,” *The History Teacher* 39, no. 1 (November 2005): 23-32.
12. For an overview of debates on historical truth, see Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York: Norton, 1995); Carlos Barros and Lawrence J. McCrank, eds., *History Under Debate: International Reflection on the Discipline* (New York: Routledge, 2012); James J. Sheehan, “How Do We Learn from History?” *Perspectives on History* 43,

no. 1 (January 2005), <<https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2005/how-do-we-learn-from-history>>.

13. For a good overview of different perspectives on “usable pasts,” see Casey N. Blake, “Review: The Usable Past, the Comfortable Past, and the Civic Past: Memory in Contemporary America,” *Cultural Anthropology* 14, no. 3 (August 1999): 423-435.

14. For information on co-curricular activity philosophies, see Marian J. Barber, “Paths of Progress for the History Major,” *Perspectives on History* 50, no. 3 (March 2012), <<https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/march-2012/paths-of-progress-for-the-history-major>>; Ira Harkavy and Bill M. Donovan, eds., *Connecting Past and Present: Concepts and Models for Service-Learning in History* (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2011); Ya-Rong Huang and Sheue-Mei Chang, “Academic and Cocurricular Involvement: Their Relationship and the Best Combinations for Student Growth,” *Journal of College Student Development* 45, no. 4 (July/August 2004): 395-406; Cheryl Keen and Kelly Hall, “Post-Graduation Service and Civic Outcomes for High Financial Need Students of a Multi-Campus, Co-Curricular Service-Learning College Program,” *Journal of College and Character* 10, no. 2 (2008).

15. Note that one of the requirements for the course was for each student to attend at least three such functions over the duration of the semester.

## Appendix

### **HIS 3960: Professionalizing History Majors Beginning/End-of-Semester Student Survey**

Students enrolled in “Professionalizing History Majors” answer the following survey questions on the first day of class, and the survey is administered again (with three additional questions) on the Final Exam day. The questions were developed with information taken directly, or with slight modifications to make them relevant to course content, from the following sources:

Mary Jo Festle, “How They Change: Students Tell Us How History Transforms Them,” *Perspectives on History* 53, no. 9 (December 2015): 30-31.

University of Central Florida, “First Destination Survey,” Undergraduate Exit Survey (2015), <<https://career.ucf.edu/first-destination-survey/>>.

American Historical Association, “AHA History Tuning Project: 2013 History Discipline Core,” <<https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/tuning-the-history-discipline/2013-history-discipline-core>>.

#### Beginning/End-of-Semester Student Survey

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

In one sentence, explain why you are a History major.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

1. What is “historiography”?
  - A. The study of history and biography
  - B. The study of history interpretations
  - C. The study of history and geography
  - D. The study of history facts
  
2. Which of the following best characterizes what History Majors and Professional Historians do?
  - A. Engage in historical inquiry, research, and analysis
  - B. Engage in predictions about future societies based on the past
  - C. Engage in crafting historical rationales for nation-state patriotism
  - D. None of the above

3. Which of the following best characterizes what History Majors and Professional Historians do?
  - A. Practice historical objectivity
  - B. Practice historical empathy
  - C. Practice historical punditry
  - D. None of the above
  
4. Which of the following best characterizes what History Majors and Professional Historians do?
  - A. Understand the unchanging nature of historical truth
  - B. Understand the complex nature of the historical record
  - C. Understand the static nature of historical evidence
  - D. None of the above
  
5. Which of the following best characterizes what History Majors and Professional Historians do?
  - A. Generate significant, open-ended questions about the past and devise research strategies to answer them
  - B. Generate exceptional, celebratory conclusions about the past and devise research strategies to explain them
  - C. Generate important, dogmatic assessments about the past and devise research strategies to validate them
  - D. None of the above
  
6. Which of the following best characterizes what History Majors and Professional Historians do?
  - A. Craft historical narrative and argument
  - B. Craft new explanations for old problems
  - C. Craft usable pasts for non-traditional audiences
  - D. None of the above
  
7. Which of the following best characterizes what History Majors and Professional Historians do?
  - A. Practice historical thinking as central to engaged citizenship
  - B. Practice historical thinking as central to societal stability
  - C. Practice historical thinking as central to organizational leadership
  - D. None of the above
  
8. In terms of employment, what career do you believe your History major will enable you to pursue?
  - A. Professor at a 4-year research-oriented university
  - B. Professor at a 4-year teaching-oriented university/liberal arts college
  - C. Professor or full-time Instructor at a community/state college

- D. Teacher in a K-12 public or private school system
- E. Museum professional (manager, curator, other)
- F. Archivist in government or private industry
- G. Non-history-related job in government:  
*Please specify:* \_\_\_\_\_
- H. Non-history-related job in private industry:  
*Please specify:* \_\_\_\_\_
- I. Other:  
*Please specify:* \_\_\_\_\_

9. In terms of civic engagement and your non-career life, what do you believe your History major will enable you to pursue?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

10. Please select the statement which MOST CLOSELY describes your PRIMARY plan IMMEDIATELY after graduation.

- A. Employment (seeking, applying or secured, full-time or part-time, self-employed, internship, paid or unpaid)
- B. Continuing education (applying or admitted to graduate school, professional school, or other post-college education)
- C. Military service
- D. Volunteering (e.g., AmeriCorps, community service, etc.)
- E. Starting or raising a family
- F. Taking time off

11. In what industry/field do you plan to work after completing your education at UCF?

- A. Non-Profit
- B. Government
- C. Research
- D. Social services
- E. Law and legal services
- F. Technology/Computers (hardware, software, etc.)
- G. Leisure and travel
- H. Education
- I. Media and communications (print, television, radio, electronic, Internet publishing, etc.)
- J. Military
- K. Other:  
*Please specify:* \_\_\_\_\_

12. Which statement best describes your POST-COLLEGE EDUCATION PLANS (within 2 years of graduation) in terms of graduate school, professional school, other higher education?  
*\*If you answer A, skip to Question 15.*
- Do not plan to pursue post-college education within the next 1-2 years
  - Considering my options and plan to apply to institutions in the near future
  - Submitted one or more applications and awaiting decisions
  - Accepted to one or more institutions, but have not made a decision
  - Admitted and decided which institution to attend
13. What further education or advanced degree(s) are you considering?  
 (Select all that apply)
- B.A., B.S., or other second bachelor's degree
  - J.D. or other law degree
  - M.A., M.S., M.Eng., or other master's degree
  - B.D., M.Div., or other religious degree
  - Ph.D., Ed.D., or other doctoral degree
  - Certificate or professional license
  - M.D., D.O., D.D.S., D.V.M.
  - Other:  
*Please specify:* \_\_\_\_\_
14. What BROAD field of study are you considering for higher education, graduate school, or professional school? (Select all that apply)
- Foreign languages, literatures, and linguistics
  - Area, ethnic, cultural, gender, and group studies
  - History
  - Philosophy and religious studies
  - Homeland security, criminology, law enforcement, firefighting, and related protective services
  - Business, management, marketing, and related support services
  - Communications
  - Legal professions and studies
  - Public administration and social service professions (social work, counseling, etc.)
  - Computer and information sciences and support services
  - Social sciences (anthropology, economics, international relations, political science, sociology, urban studies, etc.)
  - Library science
  - Theology and religious vocations

- N. Education
- O. English language and literature/letters
- P. Other:

*Please specify:* \_\_\_\_\_

15. In what industry/field do you plan to work after completing graduate or professional school?

- A. Non-Profit
- B. Government
- C. Research
- D. Social services
- E. Law and legal services
- F. Technology/Computers (hardware, software, etc.)
- G. Leisure and travel
- H. Education
- I. Media and communications (print, television, radio, electronic, Internet publishing, etc.)
- J. Military
- K. Other:

*Please specify:* \_\_\_\_\_

16. Select the activities in which you were engaged during your time at UCF. (Select all that apply)

- A. Participated in organizations related to major
- B. Participated in professional organizations
- C. Participated in community service or volunteer work
- D. Participated in Student Government Association (SGA)
- E. Participated in the Student Alumni Association - 4EVER KNIGHTS
- F. Participated in an SGA-Funded Agency (CAB, Homecoming, MSC, VUCF, etc.)
- G. Studied Abroad
- H. Other UCF clubs and organizations
- I. Joined an honorary society
- J. Held a leadership position in a student organization or SGA
- K. Presented, defended, published, performed, or exhibited a formal research project
- L. Served in a Peer Leader role (Resident Assistant, O-Teamer, Peer Involvement Counselor, Intramural Official, etc.)
- M. Participated in a research project with a faculty mentor for one or more semesters such as a capstone thesis project, independent research, or a similar opportunity
- N. Joined a fraternity or sorority

- O. Employed part-time on campus
- P. Played in a sport club
- Q. Employed full-time on campus
- R. Participated in intramural sports
- S. Employed part-time off campus
- T. Completed an internship, field experience, or clinical assignment
- U. Employed full-time off campus
- V. Completed a co-op (Cooperative Education)
- W. Other:

*Please specify:* \_\_\_\_\_

17. To what extent has your UCF experience contributed to your knowledge, skills, and professional development in the following areas?

Critical thinking

- A. Very little                      B. Some                      C. Very much

Problem solving

- A. Very little                      B. Some                      C. Very much

Persuading or influencing others

- A. Very little                      B. Some                      C. Very much

Conflict resolution

- A. Very little                      B. Some                      C. Very much

Creativity

- A. Very little                      B. Some                      C. Very much

Interpersonal communication

- A. Very little                      B. Some                      C. Very much

Planning and organizing

- A. Very little                      B. Some                      C. Very much

Analyzing quantitative data

- A. Very little                      B. Some                      C. Very much

Teamwork

- A. Very little                      B. Some                      C. Very much

Research

- A. Very little                      B. Some                      C. Very much

Computer proficiency

- A. Very little                      B. Some                      C. Very much

Written communication

- A. Very little                      B. Some                      C. Very much

Public speaking

- A. Very little                      B. Some                      C. Very much

Multicultural competency

- A. Very little                      B. Some                      C. Very much

Leadership

- A. Very little                      B. Some                      C. Very much

Professional Networking

- A. Very little                      B. Some                      C. Very much

Additional Open Questions for  
End-of-Semester Student Survey

A. How has your understanding of “what history is” changed during your studies at UCF?

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B. What, if anything, in this course helped change your understanding of Historians and History?

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C. Did anything in this course make you rethink your role in society as a History Major?

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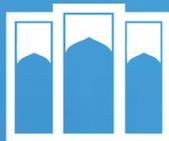
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