

## Western Civilization and World History

### Description and Learning Outcomes

Courses approved for the Western Civilization and World History category must meet at least three of the five following outcomes.

1. Demonstrate familiarity with the major chronology of Western civilization or world history.
2. Demonstrate the ability to narrate and explain long-term changes and continuities in Western civilization or world history.
3. Identify, evaluate, and appropriately cite online and print resources.
4. Develop multiple historical literacies by analyzing primary sources of various kinds (texts, images, music) and using these sources as evidence to support interpretation of historical events.
5. Communicate effectively— through speech, writing, and use of digital media—their understanding of patterns, process, and themes in the history of Western civilization or the world.

### Approved Courses and Enrollment

Students are required to pass one of the courses approved for Western Civilization and World History or transfer in an appropriate course. During the assessment period, two courses were approved to meet the Western Civilization and World History requirement:

HIST 100 History of Western Civilization  
HIST 125 Introduction to World History

Western Civilization and World History courses enroll over 4,000 students each year with an average class size of 50 (see Table 26). Figure 68 shows enrollment trends over the past five years.

Students in the Honors College take HNRS 240: Reading the Past to fulfill their learning outcomes in this category. Although not formally a part of the Mason Core, HNRS 240 is also included in this assessment.

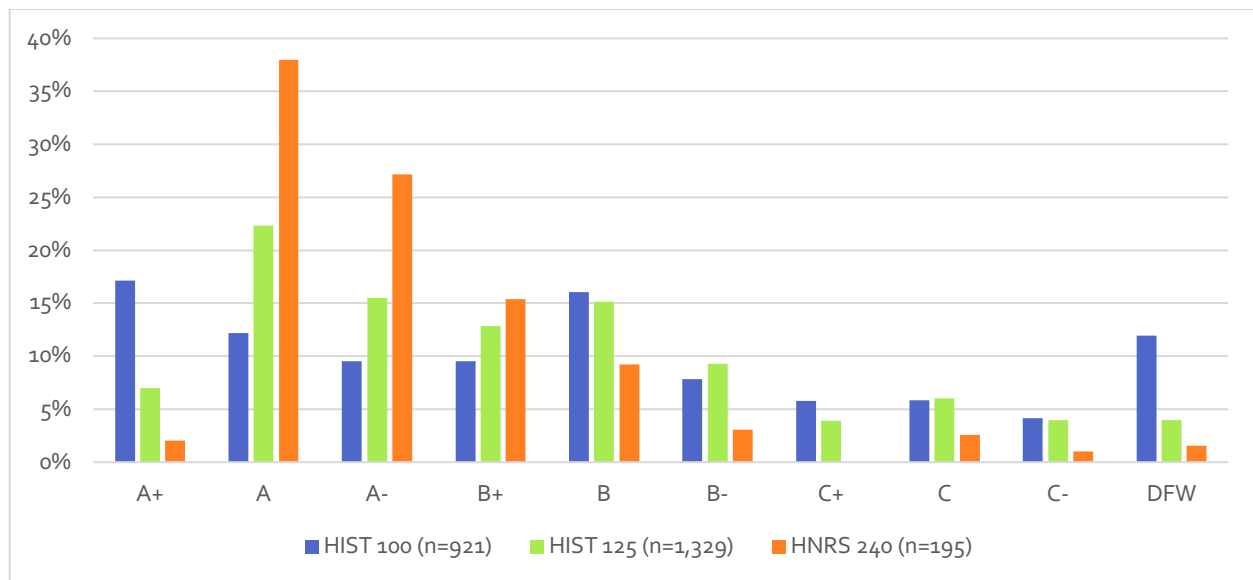
## Courses Included in Assessment

The assessment period included 38 sections of HIST 100 and 125 taught in fall 2017, three sections of HIST 100 and 125 at Mason Korea in fall 2018, and nine sections of HNRS 240 in fall 2018. All sections offered in the assessment period were expected to participate. Of the 50 course sections included in the assessment period, 84% submitted materials.

## Enrollment and Grades Distribution

A total of 2,127 students enrolled in HIST 100 and 125, and 195 enrolled in HNRS 240 in the assessment period. Of these students, 88% passed HIST 100, 96% passed HIST 125, and 98% passed HNRS 240 with a C- or above (see Figure 62).

Figure 62. Grades Distribution for HIST 100 and 125 in fall 2017, and HNRS 240 in fall 2018



## Assessment Methods

Student written work samples were requested from all course sections taught in the assessment period. Faculty were asked to submit samples completed in the final third part of the semester and allowed students to demonstrate their learning on one or more of the expected course learning outcomes. Samples were selected using randomized course enrollment lists to insure the best possible representative sample.

The **Mason Core Rubric for Evaluating Student Work in Western Civilization/World History** was used for this assessment. The rubric was developed by Mason faculty as a tool to assess individual student work on six learning tasks or outcomes. The rubric uses four performance descriptors: Benchmark, Emerging Milestone, Advanced Milestone, and Capstone, as well as an option for "no evidence." The performance descriptors are developmental, identifying

student performance levels in a context of learning and growth. The rubric is intended to be used across all of the years of a student's college experience, and is not limited to a single course, assignment, or student class level.

Using a process modeled after the VALUE Institute reviewer calibration, faculty reviewers were trained to use the rubric to assess student work. Reviews were normed to produce consistent ratings across reviewers. Reviewers met for an in-person, one-day training and review session and completed the reviews of student work by the end of the day. Reviewers were faculty members who have taught Western Civilization/World History courses and related Mason Core courses. Reviewers earned a small stipend for their efforts.

Each student work sample was assessed twice. Results were analyzed for interrater reliability; discrepant reviews were resolved using a third review.

### Learning Outcomes Assessment Results

Figures 63-66 display results from 117 randomly selected student work samples rated on the rubric. The six outcomes were grouped into two conceptual categories with three learning outcomes each:

1. Understanding Historical Concepts (Figures 63-64)
  - a. Demonstrate knowledge of major patterns, processes, themes and events
  - b. Situate events, concepts, and/or sources within broad historical context(s)
  - c. Demonstrate knowledge of historical causation or chronological reasoning
2. Thinking Like a Historian (Figures 65-66)
  - a. Identify, evaluate, and cite primary and secondary historical sources to present an interpretation
  - b. Evaluate and analyze various interpretations of the past to describe historical events
  - c. Effectively construct and communicate a defensible historical account

Figures 63 and 64 include "no evidence" ratings; a rating of "no evidence" was used when the learning outcome could not be seen in the sample; this could mean that either the assignment did not require application of the outcome, or that the student did not demonstrate it. A "no evidence" rating provides important information in aggregate but is given no value for an individual sample. Note that most of the samples showed evidence of the learning outcomes; samples were least likely to show evidence of learning outcome #4, "identify, evaluate, and cite primary and secondary historical sources to present an interpretation." It was surmised that this may reflect the fact that in-class essay exams represented a substantive portion of the work samples, and this outcome would not be expected to be performed on exams.

Figure 63. Assessment Results, Aggregated, including "No Evidence" Ratings: Outcomes #1-3, "Understanding Historical Concepts"

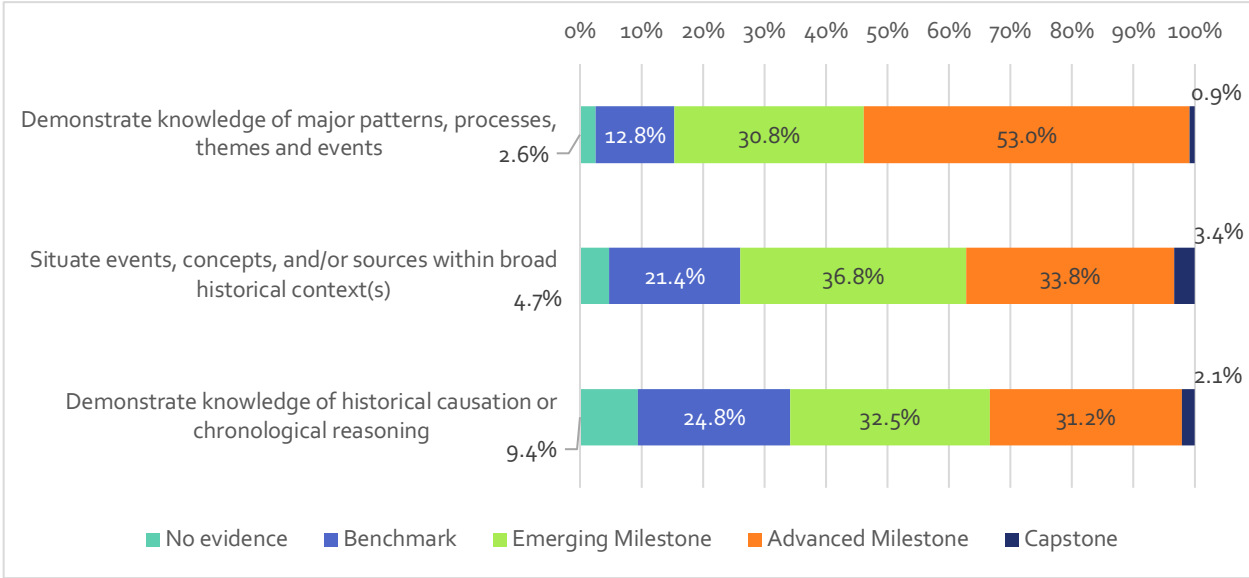


Figure 64. Assessment Results, Aggregated, including "No Evidence" Ratings: Outcomes #4-6, "Thinking Like a Historian"

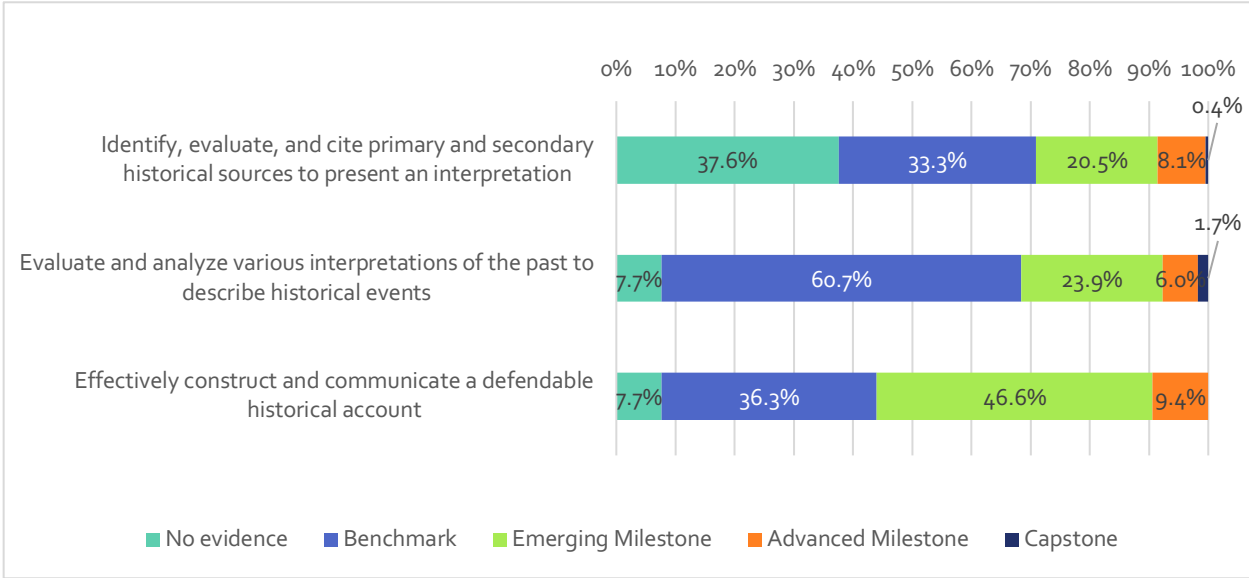


Figure 65. Assessment Results, Aggregated, excluding "No Evidence" Ratings: Outcomes #1-3, "Understanding Historical Concepts"

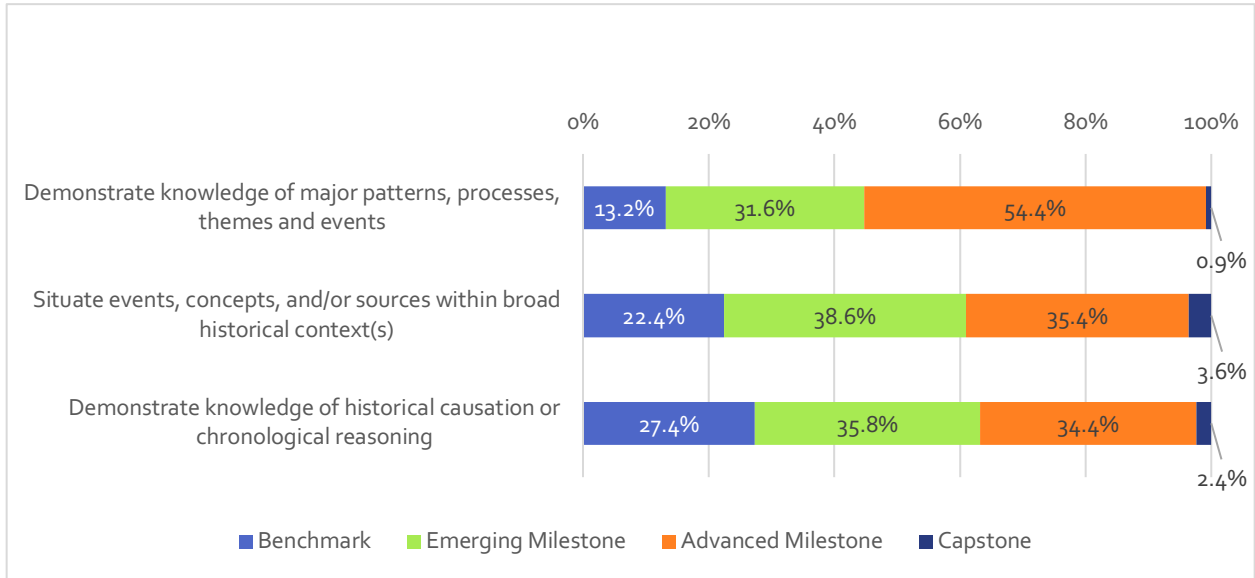
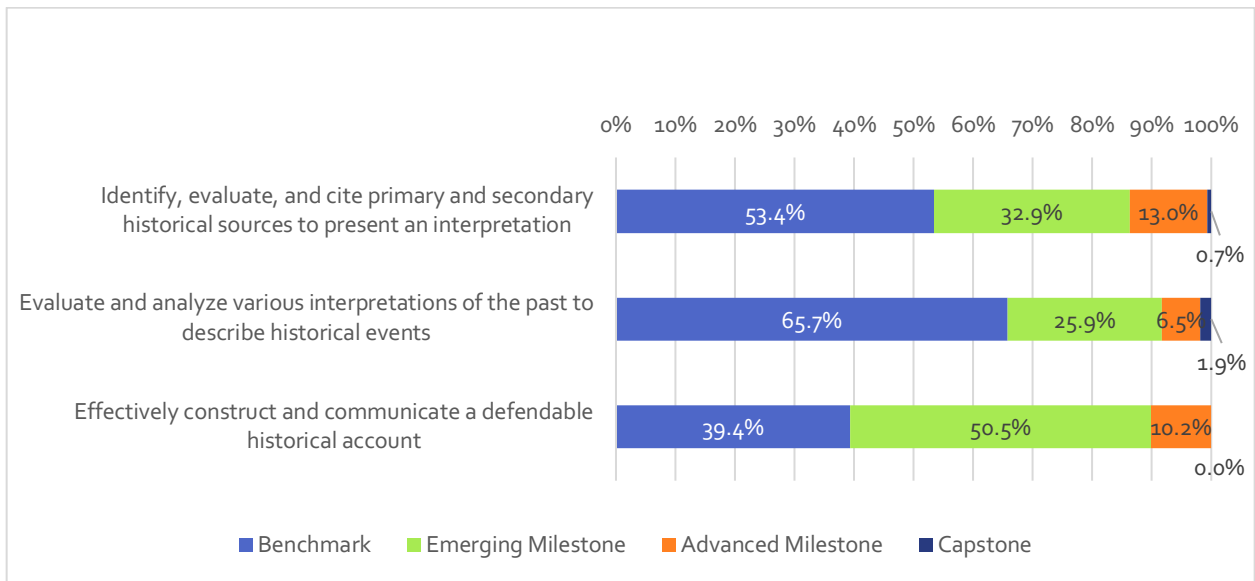


Figure 66. Assessment Results, Aggregated, excluding "No Evidence" Ratings: Outcomes #4-6, "Thinking Like a Historian"



### Highlights from Analysis of Results

Data were analyzed to ascertain differences among courses in achieving the six learning outcomes. Comparison tests were conducted using nonparametric statistics because rubric data are ordinal; Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney  $U$ , ( $p < .05$ ) was used when analyzing

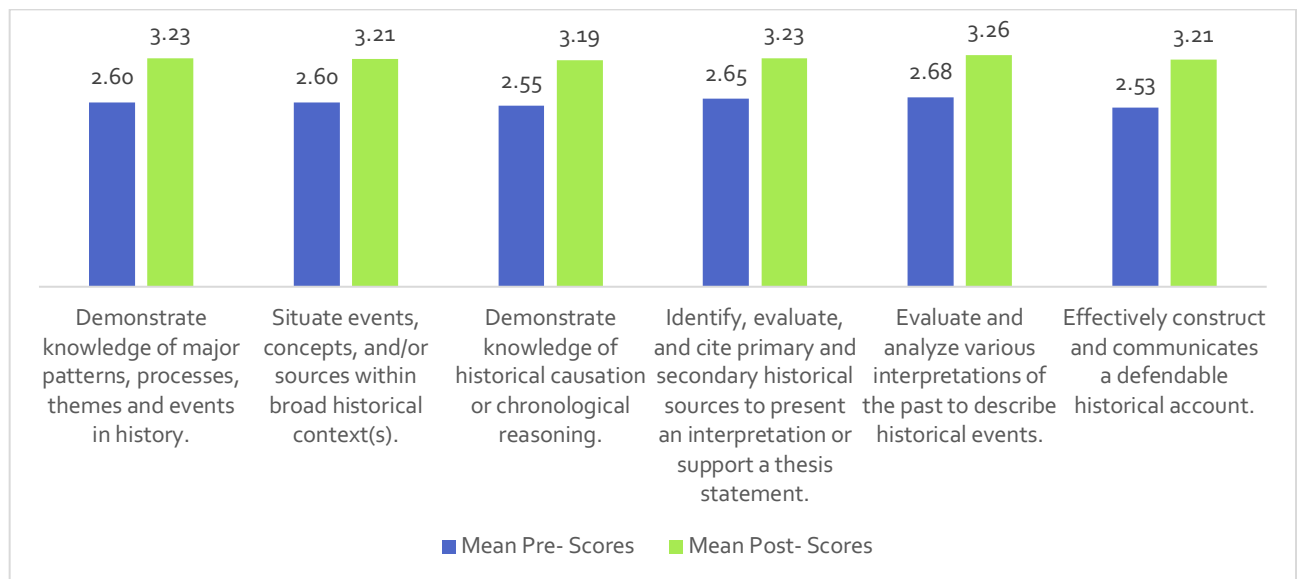
differences between two groups, and Independent-Samples Kruskal–Wallis  $H$  test was used to analyze differences across the three courses. Significant findings ( $p < .05$ ) are noted below.

- A comparison between HIST 100 and HIST 125 found that HIST 125 samples were rated higher than HIST 100 on the first three outcomes—**Understanding Historical Concepts**. There were no differences on the second set of outcomes—**Thinking Like a Historian**.
- HNRS 240 samples were rated significantly higher ( $p < .05$ ) than HIST 100 (but not HIST 125) on two outcomes only: **Demonstrate knowledge of major patterns, processes, themes and events**; and **Demonstrate knowledge of historical causation or chronological reasoning**.

### *Student Self-Assessment*

All students who were enrolled in a Mason Core Western Civilization or World History course during the assessment period received an online self-assessment survey at the end of the semester. The retrospective pre-post self-assessment asked students to rate their knowledge and skills on six learning outcomes at the beginning of the semester (pre), and then again at the end of the semester (post). In total, 238 students completed both the pre and post items, resulting in a 10% response rate. A t-test pairwise comparison showed significant perceived learning gains on all six outcomes (see Figure 67).

Figure 67. Mean Scores on Student Learning Self-Assessment, Western Civilization/World History



Mean scores, self-reported on a scale of 1-4,  $n=238$ ,  $p < .05$

## How do the Results Meet Expectations?

Because this was the first time that Mason used this rubric to assess student work, these data provide baseline information. In post-assessment conversations, History faculty were pleased with the results and considered student performance to be appropriate for 100-level courses.

## How are Results Being Used to Improve Students' Educational Experience?

A series of open meetings (including an online option) were held in February 2018 to share results, as well as a special discussion at an all-faculty meeting in the History department. Some faculty expressed intention to incorporate the rubric into their courses for more frequent assessment of these outcomes. There has been some interest in comparing these results to senior-level writing in the discipline. Additionally, History faculty have expanded their definition of communication in the discipline and have been reconsidering how they teach and assess various forms of scholarly communication; this may also affect the introductory curriculum.

In AY2017, the History department responded to student demand for more sections of HIST 125: Introduction to World History and adjusted course offerings beginning in AY2018 (see Figure 1). In line with this enrollment shift, the department has since initiated a series of brown bag meetings specifically devoted to HIST 125, in the hope of advancing their discussion of these issues. They have also requested authorization to hire a term faculty member to teach HIST 125. If granted, they plan to request that the faculty member be granted a course reduction to function as a "course coordinator" for HIST 125, with the goal of having a point person who will be tasked with continuing to push these conversations and help mobilize faculty efforts towards improving students' learning experiences in the course. As a high enrollment set of courses, HIST 100/125 is the only program of its kind in the Mason Core (e.g., ENGH 101, COMM 101, etc.) that does not have a compensated course coordinator to coordinate the efforts of the many faculty who teach the course.

## Limitations of this Assessment

Overall, this assessment was well-designed for the student work in these courses. Faculty expressed some concern that written essay exams may not have performed as highly as research papers, though the data did not bear out their concerns. The sample size was insufficient to perform a robust analysis of results based on student demographics.

## Assessment Rubric(s)

The **Mason Core Rubric for Evaluating Student Work in Western Civilization/World History** was developed by a team of Mason History faculty to evaluate student work for the Mason Core learning outcomes in Western Civilization and World History. The rubric was modeled after the AAC&U VALUE rubrics and was informed by the Measuring College Learning Project

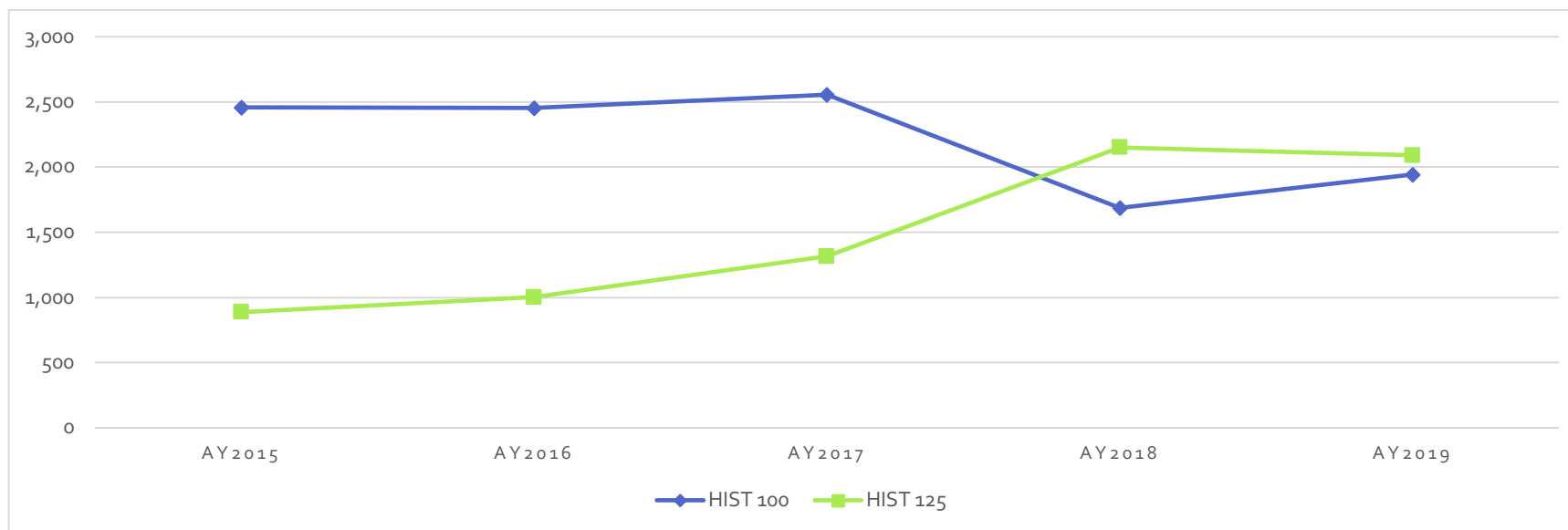
(Calder & Steffes, 2016). The rubric is designed to evaluate student performance on six learning outcomes, with four increasingly sophisticated performance descriptors for each outcome. The rubric can be used with many types of written work. Most student work will not show evidence of all six outcomes; in this case, an additional category for “no evidence” should be made available.



Table 26. Enrollment in Mason Core Western Civilization/World History Courses, AY2017-19

	AY2017			AY2018			AY2019		
	#Course Sections	Enrollment	Ave Class Size	#Course Sections	Enrollment	Ave Class Size	#Course Sections	Enrollment	Ave Class Size
<b>HIST 100</b>	43	2,555	59	27	1,687	62	36	1,941	54
<b>HIST 125</b>	30	1,316	44	49	2,150	44	45	2,090	46
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>3,871</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>3,837</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>4,031</b>	<b>50</b>

Figure 68. Five-Year Enrollment Trends in Western Civilization/World History Courses, AY2015-19



## Mason Core Rubric for Evaluating Student Work in Western Civilization/World History

This rubric was developed by a team of faculty experts to evaluate student work for the Mason Core learning outcomes in Western Civilization and World History. For more information about the learning outcomes and approved courses, <http://masoncore.gmu.edu/western-civilizationworld-history/>

**How to use this rubric:** This rubric is designed to evaluate student performance on six learning outcomes, with four increasingly sophisticated performance descriptors for each outcome. This rubric can be used with many types of written work. Most student work will not show evidence of all six outcomes; in this case, an additional category for “no evidence” should be made available.

Student Learning Outcomes	Level of Performance			
	Capstone	Advanced Milestone	Emerging Milestone	Benchmark
1. Demonstrate knowledge of <b>major patterns, processes, themes and events</b>	Identify and describe in detail a historical pattern, process, theme, or event and fully explain its broader historical significance	Identify and describe a historical pattern, process, theme, or event and attempt to explain its broader historical significance	Identify a historical pattern, process, theme or event	Partially identify a historical pattern, process, theme or event with no effort to explain its broader historical significance
2. <b>Situate</b> events, concepts, and/or sources <b>within broad historical context(s)</b>	Place an event, concept, or source in relation to other major events or developments, and present an argument about the relationship between the particular (event, concept, or source) and the general (broader) context(s), taking into account the beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and historically situated assumptions demonstrated in the event, concept, or source	Place an event, concept, or source in relation to other major events or developments and present an argument about the relationship between the particular (event, concept, or source) and the general (broader) context(s)	Place an event, concept, or source in relation to at least one other major event or development, but not present a convincing argument about the relationship between the particular (event, concept, or source) and the general (broader) context(s)	Attempt to situate event, concept, or source within a historical context but not develop or present a convincing argument about the relationship between the particular (event, concept, or source) and the general (broader) context(s)
3. Demonstrate knowledge of <b>historical causation or chronological reasoning</b>	Provide multi-causal, complex, and layered account for historical change based upon an awareness of time, sequencing, and periodization by prioritizing and analyzing a variety of historical influences	Provide a multi-causal (economic, social, political, etc.) account for historical change based upon an awareness of time, sequencing, and periodization	Provide a simple, monocausal account for historical change based upon an awareness of time, sequencing, and periodization	Demonstrate an emerging awareness of time, sequencing, and periodization

## Mason Core Rubric for Evaluating Student Work in Western Civilization/World History

Student Learning Outcomes	Level of Performance			
	Capstone	Advanced Milestone	Emerging Milestone	Benchmark
4. Identify, evaluate, and cite primary and secondary historical <b>sources</b> to present an interpretation	Properly identify, evaluate, and cite primary and secondary source material, while weighing issues of genre, content, audience, perspective, and purpose in order to analyze and locate evidence to be used in support of an interpretation	Properly and fully identify and cite sources in support of an historical interpretation, while making a distinction between primary and secondary source materials	Identify and cite sources in support of an historical interpretation, while making a basic distinction between primary and secondary source materials	Begin to identify and cite sources to support an historical interpretation
5. Evaluate and analyze various <b>interpretations</b> of the past to describe historical events	Present an interpretation of a historical event and/or process that demonstrates an understanding of conflicting interpretations of the past and that analyzes the basis for each interpretation	Present an interpretation of a historical event and/or process while acknowledging differing interpretations of historical events and/or processes	Present an interpretation of a historical event and/or process that attempts to incorporate at least one differing interpretation	Present an interpretation of a historical event and/or process
6. Effectively <b>construct and communicate</b> a defensible historical account	Articulate a persuasive historical account of a historical event or process with a clear and well-developed thesis, supported by diverse and/or conflicting sources	Articulate a persuasive explanation for a historical event or process with an identifiable thesis that engages with diverse and/or conflicting evidence	Articulate a basic explanation for a historical event or process with an identifiable thesis that is supported by organized evidence	Articulate a basic explanation for a historical event or process with a simple yet identifiable thesis; sequencing of information may be random