

# **Informal Writing in Comprehensive History Survey Courses:**

**An Experiment in the Use of Informal  
Writing Assignments in “Introduction to  
Western Civilization” at the  
University of Minnesota, 1989-1990**

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*A research report submitted to the Center for Interdisciplinary  
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**THE CENTER FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES OF WRITING**  
**UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA**  
**227 LIND HALL**  
**207 CHURCH STREET S.E.**  
**MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55455**

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## **Preface**

As the importance of strong writing is increasingly emphasized in various disciplines, the need for information on the effective teaching and learning of writing grows too. The informal writing assignment is just one valuable means of teaching both the subject at hand and also in helping students strengthen their writing skills for more formal papers. Proven successful in many cases, the informal writing assignment is ungraded and does not require the style or polish of more formal papers, allowing students to focus instead on the exploration of ideas and opinions. In their 1989-1990 research, John Currin and James Tracy, Professors of History at the University of Minnesota, looked at the efficacy of informal writing assignments in a lower-level Western Civilization course, as well as at the student responses to the exercises. The course was designed to experiment with the then newly proposed WAC program at the University of Minnesota. This paper discusses their findings and their explanation of the purpose of informal writing assignments.

Papers such as this one, together with ongoing Center projects, aim to contribute to improve undergraduate writing, the Center's primary mission. Along with colloquia, conferences, publications, and other outreach activities, the Center annually funds research projects by University of Minnesota faculty who study any of the following topics:

- characteristics of writing across the University's curriculum;
- status reports on students' writing ability and the University;
- the connection between writing and learning in all fields;
- the characteristics of writing beyond the academy;

- the effects of ethnicity, race, class, and gender on writing; and
- curricular reform through writing-intensive instruction.

We are pleased to present this technical report as part of the ongoing discussions about writing in academia; one of the goals of the Center's publications is to encourage conversations about writing. We invite you to contact the Center about this publication or any others in the series.

Lillian Bridwell-Bowles, Series Editor  
Elizabeth Oliver, Editor  
July, 2003

INFORMAL WRITING IN COMPREHENSIVE HISTORY SURVEY COURSES: AN  
EXPERIMENT IN THE USE OF INFORMAL WRITING ASSIGNMENTS IN  
“INTRODUCTION TO WESTERN CIVILIZATION” AT THE  
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA,  
1989-1990

By  
John M. Currin and James D. Tracy  
Department of History  
University of Minnesota

While writing is essential to the practice of history, teaching the writing of history is not often regarded as the proper function of introductory history courses. Concerns about the deteriorating quality of student writing in upper and lower division college courses have kindled interest in “Writing Across the Curriculum” programs at many colleges and universities. John Patrick Donnelly of Marquette University recently argued that the requirement of term papers in introductory history courses is the best remedy for this problem because freshmen put into immediate practice the principles they have learned in their composition courses.<sup>1</sup> History instructors, aware that most students in introductory history courses need guidance through the writing process, have considered ways writing can be used in history courses.<sup>2</sup> Some have emphasized the value of “prewriting” and “informal assignments” to teach historical writing as a process. Informal assignments, because they are ungraded and do not expect the stylistic polish of formal essays, have been seen as an excellent tool for teaching and learning history. In theory, informal writing, by alleviating students from the anxieties of grades and correct usage, helps them to relax and to feel free to explore ideas and express opinions. In the process,

they learn to think about history and this helps them with writing more formal history papers.<sup>3</sup> As part of a proposed “Writing Across the Curriculum” program at the University of Minnesota, the Department of History developed two new survey courses with a special writing component. These two courses, HIST 1021, 1022, 1023, “Introduction to Western Civilization,” and HIST 1011, 1012, 1013, “Introduction to World Civilization,” use a combination of “informal” and “formal” assignments to teach the process of historical writing. “Introduction to Western Civilization,” the first of the new surveys to be introduced, became the “laboratory” for testing the effectiveness of informal writing as a learning tool in comprehensive history survey course. This paper concerns this experiment. It discusses the purpose of informal writing, the types of assignments used in the Western Civilization survey at Minnesota, and the students' evaluations of these assignments.

Teaching a Western Civilization survey course in a regular academic year of approximately 30 weeks of class time, with the addition of informal and formal writing elements, created particular problems. Most students in introductory Western Civilization must be seen as blank slates because at least 50% of high school students have never studied either World History or Western Civilization.<sup>4</sup> Students find themselves struggling to absorb and comprehend a steady stream of events, new names, strange concepts, unfamiliar geography, and complex chronology. Asking students to write history presupposes that they can at least distinguish between the narrative mode, which describes action in time, and the analytical mode, which is used for interpretation and explication of political, social and cultural events and issues.<sup>5</sup> Because analysis is the primary task of academic historians --even among those who have revived the narrative<sup>6</sup>-

- the teaching of historical writing entails the teaching of historical analysis. Students should also learn the part imagination plays in historical writing, how historians, through the mind's eye, reconstruct from a variety of records and artifacts past societies and events. Imagination can restore the uncertainty of history from a rigid, positivistic determinism by revealing the possible unrealized alternatives of realized events.<sup>7</sup>

In 1977, the British Historical Association and the Council of Subject Teachers' Associations Commission considered the particular problems of language in history teaching. Among these problems: historians' use of language as abstract concepts to describe a variety of institutions, cultures and ideas; the historical meaning of words; the value-laden content of language in historical writing; and the vocabulary and syntax used to depict complex historical relationships. Those students who lack the basic writing skill cannot be expected to master the uses of language in historical writing. As the British report on language and history teaching noted, "historical prose is deceptively difficult to write and will never be trained by dictation of notes or the setting of formal essays before the necessary skills have been developed."<sup>8</sup> Without adequate preparation in writing, many incoming college students are likely to be defeated by a history essay at the introductory level. The particular problems of teaching a history survey with a writing component are teaching compressed facts of history, basic composition, the complexities of language in historical writing, and the narrative and analytical modes of discourse.

The theory behind the uses of writing as a learning tool in history courses has the support of some practical teaching experience. In one noteworthy discussion of writing in history teaching, Barry K. Beyer of Carnegie-Mellon University argued that as students write more about history they tend to develop progressively an analytical approach, an



ability to synthesize data, and a sense of historicity. Beyer recommended that students be assigned short papers on specific assertions rather than general topics, with more than one draft and with the opportunity of rewriting their papers. According to Beyer, the keys to improved student writing are “frequent practice in small chunks with immediate feedback,” and a close relationship between “prewriting activities and rewriting.”<sup>9</sup>

Other instructors who have used writing in history classes agree with the need for constant practice. John McClymer and Kenneth J. Moynihan of Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts, David Keightley of the University of California at Berkeley, and John Breihan of Loyola College in Baltimore, provided their students with frequent writing practice by assigning short essays each week or by giving informal writing exercises once or twice a week.<sup>10</sup> Henry Steffens of the University of Vermont and Vera Blinn Reber of Shippensburg University had their students write journal entries for each class session.<sup>11</sup> As these history teachers showed, frequent writing exercises are quite effective with helping students learn historical material and with teaching students the skills of historical writing. McClymer and Moynihan, using an “inquiry” approach based on primary sources, believe that through writing, their students became acquainted with the complexities of historical evidence. Through writing assignments, their students also learned to interpret evidence critically, and to formulate further questions.<sup>12</sup> Keightley discovered that because of his weekly assignments, students became more engaged with what they had learned in lecture and through the course readings.<sup>13</sup> Breihan found that his informal exercises helped students with a variety of skills. These exercises improved the students' note taking by teaching them how to better order the information they received in lecture. Informal exercises taught students how to summarize information found in the

course texts, and these exercises helped students to learn actively from their readings. Narrative exercises helped them learn chronology, and exercises on analysis helped students detect the analytical elements of a historical narrative. Through journals, students developed empathy with historical figures and a balanced perspective of both sides of an issue.<sup>14</sup>

C. B. Culpin, a British history teacher, wrote that students can discover past characters and situations through the exploration of language. With other history teachers, Culpin experimented with ways to “bridge the gap” between the past and present, between factual reporting and creative imagination. In one assignment, for example, Culpin asked students to imagine that they worked in a Lancashire cotton factory in early 19th-century Britain. He had them investigate the feelings and attitudes of workers and, according to Culpin, the students developed some empathy for the workers.<sup>15</sup> This use of imagination in historical writing is much like E. P. Thompson's The Making of the English Working Class. But the emphasis on developing empathy might cause students to romanticize past characters and ages, to become imaginatively anachronistic. Moreover, students could slip into a crude relativism by believing that historical truth is whatever the historian's mind makes it to be.<sup>16</sup>

Writing can help students understand concepts. Students must master an unfamiliar vocabulary before they can comprehend difficult ideas. The Council of Subject Teachers' Association Commission warned that history instructors often use language and concepts beyond the intellectual grasp of average students, and therefore, from the students' perspective, a “language without meaning.” Teachers ought not to expect from their students full comprehension of complex ideas straight away; they

should participate in the students' process of comprehension. The Council of Subject Teachers' Association Commission urged that "attention and value should be given to rough 'thinking out' work and to problematic writing, i.e. searching for solutions."<sup>17</sup> Journals are ideal for just such thinking out work, for, as Henry Steffens and Toby Fulwiler have said, they provide "a place to think in and a tool to think with."<sup>18</sup>

Formal and informal writing has been shown to be an effective teaching component in history courses; yet at Minnesota the history faculty lacked experience using informal assignments in combination with formal writing at the introductory level. Consequently, the first year of the new Western Civilization became an experiment in the use of different types of informal assignments to discover which designs worked best for students at Minnesota.

The course consisted of two weekly lecture periods of 75 minutes each and two weekly recitation meetings of 45-50 minutes each. Three members of the History faculty took turns teaching each quarter sequence.<sup>19</sup> Depending upon course size, five to seven graduate TAs conducted the recitation meetings, which were discussions of course readings and related issues.<sup>20</sup> To ease the burden on the TAs and allow them more time for each student, the maximum load for each TA was reduced to two sections of 20 students meeting twice a week from three sections of 35 students meeting once a week. The writing component for HIST 1021 consisted of two ungraded informal assignments and two short formal papers of approximately five pages in length based on course source readings. Students were required to prepare a first draft and a revised version for each formal paper. Course requirements also included mid-quarter and final essay examinations.

The TAs thought that the course requirements were a bit too much for the average students to manage in a ten-week quarter. Heavy reading loads, deadlines for informal papers, first drafts and revisions, and preparations for an essay examination every five weeks set a quick pace for the course. Many students, feeling overwhelmed, were not absorbing the material as well as had been hoped, and some became discouraged. The TAs recommended modifying the writing component to three informal assignments and one formal paper, with the usual first draft and revised version. This seemed to ease the pace and make the course more manageable for the students; but the course remained more demanding than the regular introductory surveys.

The teaching faculty for the Western Civilization survey believed that the TAs should have the freedom and responsibility to teach their recitation sections as they saw fit. The type and content of informal assignments were left to the discretion of the TAs. They used different designs for the experiment, but all the assignments were meant to help students with basic study skills and with developing some analytical ability.

A few TAs made at least one informal assignment an exercise in class note taking and in summarizing material. Darryl Morris had his students write a one to three page summary of a class lecture. Through this exercise, he taught students how to organize their information better and how to draw out the main points of a college lecture. Morris believed that this exercise was valuable in preparing students for examinations. In one informal assignment, Morris had his students consider the evidence the authors of the course text used to support their interpretations. He discontinued it because this exercise was not as useful in preparing students for exams. In the final quarter sequence, Morris

had much success with the informal assignments as a form of "free writing" to get students to think out their formal paper topics and to develop a thesis statement.

Professor Tracy's informal assignments focused on reading comprehension and retention. He asked his honors section to read the selections from Plato's Dialogues and, without referring to the text, summarize the arguments. For the second assignment, he had his students read Einhard's Life of Charlemagne and make notes on items they had previously encountered in the source readings. Gordon Bynum varied this design and had students write out answers to a set of questions about the weekly course readings.

The journal approach seemed a good format for informal assignments. Students would have in one place their lecture and reading notes along with their informal reflections. But because of the reluctance of the TAs, this format has not been given much of a trial. The TAs, feeling pressured by their commitments to two weekly recitations, by the time it took to help students learn both history and writing, by the strain of keeping up with graduate course work, and with preparations for comprehensive examination, believed that they lacked adequate time to check journal entries frequently. One TA, Mr. Edward Schoenfeld, agreed to try the journal format in the first quarter sequence. He had students write in their journals lecture notes, lecture and reading summaries, source analyses, and practice exam questions. Mr. Schoenfeld checked the journals every week. He found that those students who took notes on course readings tended to do better in class discussions and on the formal papers. Schoenfeld, however, ceased the journals after the first quarter because he thought the process of collecting the journals each week cumbersome and because some students resented the weekly inspection of their notes. Schoenfeld's limited experience with journals supports the

belief that journals are very useful in teaching history.<sup>21</sup> Still, the Minnesota experiment suggests some difficulties of using journals in a survey course that depends upon graduate students to share in the teaching duties in addition to doing the course grading.

A few TAs used the first informal as a way to ease students into the process of writing and developing logical arguments. John Bedell first assigned his students to write a paragraph explaining their expectations about college education. Christopher Simer started by asking his students to write a short paper making an argument for some proposition.

Most TAs assigned used at least one informal as an analysis of historical sources. Kevin Haukeness had students read the Laws of Hammurabi and write out what this law code revealed about families and women besides criminal penalties. For the modern period, Haukeness had students study part of a Nazi propaganda pamphlet by Joseph Goebles and, from what they had learned about Nazi Germany, analyze its function. In HIST 1021, John Bedell had good results with an informal source analysis assigned as an in-class writing activity. This assignment was a form of the ten minute "free writing" exercise, in which the student strives to overcome inhibition to writing by scribbling down without pause for ten minutes whatever he can think of about a particular topic. Bedell handed out a translated copy of an inscription on the monument of Aurelius Longinus of the ancient city of Side in Roman Asia Minor (c. 260 A.D.) and asked the students to write a short essay describing Aurelius and his place in society.

Informal writing helped students learn how to make comparative and contrast analyses. In HIST 1021, Haukeness had students read Xenophon's description of Sparta and Pericles' funeral oration from Thucydides and write about the differences and

similarities between Athenian and Spartan societies. He used a similar assignment in HIST 1023, which covered the modern period. The students read and summarized arguments in Sieyès' "What is the Third Estate" and Metternich's secret memorandum to Tsar Alexander I and contrasted the liberal viewpoint of the early French revolution with a conservative reaction of the post-Napoleonic era.

Some informal assignments encouraged students to use their imagination. In HIST 1022, the second quarter sequence covering the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period, Schoenfeld designed an assignment to go with Eileen Power's Medieval People. In this book, Power, drawing from a variety of medieval sources and writing with vivid language, builds imaginative constructs of the social and mental worlds of selected ordinary people. Schoenfeld assigned his students the chapter on the peasant Bodo. Then, encouraging the students to emulate Power's approach, he asked them to imagine that they were a great-grandson or great granddaughter of Bodo and a second child without any chance of inheriting the family plot. Based on what they had learned about medieval life and society, the students wrote out a plan for their imaginary life following one of three options: marriage with someone in the village who would inherit a plot, acceptance of an offer to resettle on newly cleared land in the Polish frontier, or escape to a town to become an apprentice. This design worked very well. It stimulated students to reflect on the conditions of peasant life in the middle ages, and helped bridge in their imagination the gap between the past and the present. In the previous quarter sequence, Bedell had his students imitate Plato's construction of the ideal city in speech by writing about their vision of the perfect state.

Michael Bitter experimented with informal writing in class discussions. He organized his class into groups of five or six students and divided the course reading among the various groups. Responsibility for leading the class discussion of assigned readings rotated between the groups. Before the section meeting, each member of the designated group prepared as their informal paper a summary and analysis of the assigned source reading. They then read their papers in class and answered questions from their classmates. According to Bitter, this made the class discussions lively, and the students seemed to enjoy listening to papers given by their peers. However, the exercise encouraged students to study only the material assigned for their oral presentations. Gordon Bynum experimented with having students read and comment in class on an informal paper of one of their classmates. Names were blacked out so that the students' papers would remain anonymous.

According to the TAs, the informal assignments that helped students to learn the material and develop the skills for historical writing were the lecture and reading summaries and the source analyses. Through the source analyses, the students became actively engaged with the material, and the comparison and contrast analyses helped prepare them for questions on the examinations. Informal papers served as valuable tools for explorations of formal paper topics and refinement of thesis statements. Most TAs thought that the writing played an important part in the progressive improvement of the students' performance during the course.

Student evaluations of the informal writing were gathered after each quarter sequence. The evaluations were voluntary and anonymous. In HIST 1021 and 1023, students were asked at the final examination to complete and return the evaluation form.



In HIST 1022, the evaluations were given out at the last section meeting of the quarter with the departmental TA evaluations. Results from the evaluations are summarized in the following tables. Each quarter sequence is tabulated separately. Respondents are grouped by class and calculated as a percentage of each class and as a percentage of total student responses. Tables 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3 give the total course enrollments for each quarter sequence, the total number of student responses, the responses as a percentage of enrolled students, and the class breakdown of the student respondents.

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**TABLE 1.1**

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**HIST 1021 (FALL QUARTER, 1989)**

Total Course Enrollment: 175  
 Total Student Responses: 134 (76.6% of enrolled students)

**Class Breakdown of Respondents**

Freshmen: 63 (47.0%)  
 Sophomore: 46 (34.3%)  
 Junior: 16 (11.9%)  
 Senior: 6 (4.5%)  
 Other: 3 (2.3%)

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**TABLE 1.2**

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**HIST 1022 (WINTER, 1990)**

Total Course Enrollment: 155  
 Total Student Responses: 88 (56.8% of enrolled students)

**Class Breakdown of Respondents**

Freshmen: 32 (36.4%)  
 Sophomore: 33 (37.5%)  
 Junior: 19 (21.6%)  
 Senior: 3 (3.4%)  
 Other: 1 (1.1%)

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**TABLE 1.3**


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| <b><u>HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990)</u></b>       |                                 |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Total Course Enrollment:                     | 128                             |
| Total Student Responses:                     | 87 (68.0% of enrolled students) |
| <b><u>Class Breakdown of Respondents</u></b> |                                 |
| Freshmen:                                    | 38 (43.7%)                      |
| Sophomore:                                   | 32 (36.8%)                      |
| Junior:                                      | 6 (6.9%)                        |
| Senior:                                      | 7 (8.0%)                        |
| Other:                                       | 4 (4.6%)                        |

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Despite the variety of designs among TAs, the students had little difficulty comprehending the assignments. Over 90 percent of student respondents in each quarter sequence understood the informal assignments; less than three percent understood none of the assignments, and less than seven percent understood only some. (Table 2)

**TABLE 2****Students Understood Informal Writing Assignments.**

|            | <b><u>HIST 1021 (FALL, 1989)</u></b>   |           |          |
|------------|--|-----------|----------|
|            | All                                    | Some      | None     |
| Freshmen:  | 58 (92.1%)                             | 3 (4.8%)  | 2 (3.1%) |
| Sophomore: | 42 (91.3%)                             | 3 (6.5%)  | 1 (2.2%) |
| Junior:    | 14 (87.5%)                             | 2 (12.5%) | 0 (0.0%) |
| Senior:    | 5 (83.3%)                              | 1 (16.7%) | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:     | 3 (100.0%)                             | 0 (0.0%)  | 0 (0.0%) |
| Total:     | 122 (91.0%)                            | 9 (6.7%)  | 3 (2.3%) |
|            | <b><u>HIST 1022 (WINTER, 1990)</u></b> |           |          |
|            | All                                    | Some      | None     |
| Freshmen:  | 28 (87.5%)                             | 4 (12.5%) | 0 (0.0%) |
| Sophomore: | 31 (94.0%)                             | 1 (3.0%)  | 1 (3.0%) |
| Junior:    | 17 (89.4%)                             | 1 (5.3%)  | 1 (5.3%) |
| Senior:    | 3 (100.0%)                             | 0 (0.0%)  | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:     | 1 (100.0%)                             | 0 (0.0%)  | 0 (0.0%) |
| Total:     | 80 (90.99%)                            | 6 (6.8%)  | 2 (2.3%) |

|               | <b><u>HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990)</u></b> |                 |                 |
|---------------|--|-----------------|-----------------|
|               | All                                    | Some            | None            |
| Freshmen:     | 37 (97.4%)                             | 1 (2.6%)        | 0 (0.0%)        |
| Sophomore:    | 28 (87.5%)                             | 3 (9.4%)        | 1 (3.1%)        |
| Junior:       | 5 (83.3%)                              | 1 (16.7%)       | 0 (0.0%)        |
| Senior:       | 7 (100.0%)                             | 0 (0.0%)        | 0 (0.0%)        |
| Other:        | 4 (100.0%)                             | 0 (0.0%)        | 0 (0.0%)        |
| <b>Total:</b> | <b>81 (93.1%)</b>                      | <b>5 (5.7%)</b> | <b>1 (1.2%)</b> |

Professor Keightley reported that, in general, students responded favorably to the writing experiment in his Chinese history course.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, the Minnesota students showed an interest in the informal experiment. Their responses were far more favorable than the teaching staff had anticipated and suggest that they saw the informal as a valuable teaching tool.

Approximately 70 to 75 percent of student respondents said that the informal writing assignments helped them understand lecture material and course readings (Table 3). Several students believed that the informal helped them organize information and think about what they had learned. According to one student, the informal “helped get the ideas and materials in a pattern that makes sense other than just facts, names and dates.” One student wrote that the informal “went over in detail things I didn't understand at first.” Another said that it helped with thinking about possible questions and answers in history, and one other student said: “it made me think more about what I had learned; it was about the only thing that did.” Gordon Bynum's experiment with having students read the papers of their classmates helped one person see other issues and points of view. Some claimed that the informal helped them to understand background information and historical problems in greater depth, but a few thought that the informal only helped them gain detail knowledge of narrow issues. Most students found the informal more useful for

comprehending course readings than the lectures. Still, many liked the lecture summary. According to one student, the summaries “helped to put the material into context with other aspects of the course, and to think of things as a whole.” Some students believed that more informal would have helped them to better arrange the course materials, and one student suggested informal assignments for each chapter of the text.

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**TABLE 3**

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**Informal Writing Helped Students with Understanding Lectures  
and Course Readings.**

|               | <b><u>HIST 1021 (FALL, 1989)</u></b>   |                   |                   |                 |
|---------------|--|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
|               | Yes                                    | No                | Sometimes         | No Response     |
| Freshmen:     | 49 (77.8%)                             | 5 (7.9%)          | 9 (14.3%)         | 0 (0.0%)        |
| Sophomore:    | 31 (67.4%)                             | 10 (21.7%)        | 4 (8.7%)          | 1 (2.2%)        |
| Junior:       | 9 (56.2%)                              | 3 (18.8%)         | 4 (25.0%)         | 0 (0.0%)        |
| Senior:       | 5 (83.3%)                              | 1 (16.7%)         | 0 (0.0%)          | 0 (0.0%)        |
| Other:        | 3 (100.0%)                             | 0 (0.0%)          | 0 (0.0%)          | 0 (0.0%)        |
| <b>Total:</b> | <b>97 (72.4%)</b>                      | <b>19 (14.2%)</b> | <b>17 (12.7%)</b> | <b>1 (0.7%)</b> |
|               | <b><u>HIST 1022 (WINTER, 1990)</u></b> |                   |                   |                 |
|               | Yes                                    | No                | Sometimes         | No Response     |
| Freshmen:     | 18 (56.2%)                             | 6 (18.8%)         | 8 (25.0%)         | 0 (0.0%)        |
| Sophomore:    | 25 (75.8%)                             | 6 (18.2%)         | 2 (6.0%)          | 0 (0.0%)        |
| Junior:       | 15 (79.0%)                             | 2 (10.5%)         | 2 (10.5%)         | 0 (0.0%)        |
| Senior:       | 3 (100.0%)                             | 0 (0.0%)          | 0 (0.0%)          | 0 (0.0%)        |
| Other:        | 1 (100.0%)                             | 0 (0.0%)          | 0 (0.0%)          | 0 (0.0%)        |
| <b>Total:</b> | <b>62 (70.5%)</b>                      | <b>14 (15.9%)</b> | <b>12 (13.6%)</b> | <b>0 (0.0%)</b> |
|               | <b><u>HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990)</u></b> |                   |                   |                 |
|               | Yes                                    | No                | Sometimes         | No Response     |
| Freshmen:     | 29 (76.3%)                             | 4 (10.5%)         | 5 (13.2%)         | 0 (0.0%)        |
| Sophomore:    | 26 (81.2%)                             | 3 (9.4%)          | 3 (9.4%)          | 0 (0.0%)        |
| Junior:       | 6 (100.0%)                             | 0 (0.0%)          | 0 (0.0%)          | 0 (0.0%)        |
| Senior:       | 4 (57.1%)                              | 1 (14.3%)         | 2 (28.6%)         | 0 (0.0%)        |
| Other:        | 1 (25.0%)                              | 2 (50.0%)         | 1 (25.0%)         | 0 (0.0%)        |
| <b>Total:</b> | <b>66 (75.9%)</b>                      | <b>10 (11.5%)</b> | <b>11 (12.6%)</b> | <b>0 (0.0%)</b> |

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The discipline imposed by the informal was perhaps its most useful function. Many respondents from all three quarter sequences confessed that they would not have done the assigned readings if not for the informal. “When I was to do the informal writing,” wrote one student, “it forced me to really read [sic] the material and fully understand it.” Another student said that the informal not only got him or her to read the textbook but also “made me think about the course material more than I would have otherwise.” The students' remarks suggest that the informal forced them to keep up with the reading and attend class meetings.

Between 75 and 80 percent believed that the informal writings helped with the formal writing assignments and essay examinations (Table 4). For one thing, the informal helped students make up past deficiencies. According to one freshman, “I had not much experience in writing from high school, so the informal gave me a chance to see my own ability before writing a formal paper.” Informal papers also helped students learn how to develop a thesis statement and how to organize material in support of it, which some students believed helped them write the essay exams. A few thought the informal papers were less useful for essay examinations because they did not teach them how to manage the time constraints of in-class essay exams.

Students commented on what they liked best and least about the informal writing. While most respondents wrote down what they liked best, between 30 and 40 percent did not say what they liked least. (Tables 5.1 and 5.2) The similarities of student responses made classification easy. The relaxed, ungraded format appeared to be the most popular feature of the informal assignments. Between 34 and 40 percent of student respondents regarded it as the best feature. (Table 6) One student remarked, “I liked the fact that they

were not graded. This did not change the amount of effort that I put into the writing, rather it allowed for writing under no pressure. I believe that the writings were an excellent idea.” The students' responses suggest that the informal assignments succeeded in the task of easing students into the process of historical writing.

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**TABLE 4**

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**Informal Writing Helped Students with Formal Writing and Written Exams.**

| <b><u>HIST 1021 (FALL, 1989)</u></b>   |                    |                   |                 |
|--|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
|  | Yes                | No                | No Response     |
| Freshmen:                              | 56 (88.9%)         | 7 (11.1%)         | 0 (0.0%)        |
| Sophomore:                             | 31 (67.4%)         | 14 (30.4%)        | 1 (2.2%)        |
| Junior:                                | 14 (87.5%)         | 2 (12.5%)         | 0 (0.0%)        |
| Senior:                                | 5 (83.3%)          | 1 (16.7%)         | 0 (0.0%)        |
| Other:                                 | 2 (66.7%)          | 1 (33.3%)         | 0 (0.0%)        |
| <b>Total:</b>                          | <b>108 (80.6%)</b> | <b>25 (18.7%)</b> | <b>1(0.7%)</b>  |
| <b><u>HIST 1022 (WINTER, 1990)</u></b> |                    |                   |                 |
|  | Yes                | No                | No Response     |
| Freshmen:                              | 24 (75.0%)         | 7 (21.3%)         | 1 (3.1%)        |
| Sophomore:                             | 24 (72.7%)         | 9 (27.3%)         | 0 (0.0%)        |
| Junior:                                | 14 (73.7%)         | 4 (21.0%)         | 1 (5.3%)        |
| Senior:                                | 3 (100.0%)         | 0 (0.0%)          | 0 (0.0%)        |
| Other:                                 | 1 (100.0%)         | 0 (0.0%)          | 0 (0.0%)        |
| <b>Total:</b>                          | <b>66 (75.0%)</b>  | <b>20 (22.7%)</b> | <b>2 (2.3%)</b> |
| <b><u>HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990)</u></b> |                    |                   |                 |
|  | Yes                | No                | No Response     |
| Freshmen:                              | 30 (78.9%)         | 8 (21.1%)         | 0 (0.0%)        |
| Sophomore:                             | 29 (90.6%)         | 3 (9.4%)          | 0 (0.0%)        |
| Junior:                                | 5 (83.3%)          | 1 (16.7%)         | 0 (0.0%)        |
| Senior:                                | 4 (57.1%)          | 3 (42.9%)         | 0 (0.0%)        |
| Other:                                 | 1 (25.0%)          | 2 (50.0%)         | 1 (25.0%)       |
| <b>Total:</b>                          | <b>69 (79.3%)</b>  | <b>17 (19.5%)</b> | <b>1 (1.2%)</b> |

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**TABLE 5.1****Students Who Did Not Say What They Liked Best.**

| <b><u>HIST 1021 (FALL, 1989)</u></b>   |           |            |          |
|--|-----------|------------|----------|
| Freshmen:                              | 2 (3.2%)  | Sophomore: | 2 (4.3%) |
| Junior:                                | 1 (6.3%)  | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)  | Total:     | 5 (3.7%) |
| <b><u>HIST 1022 (WINTER, 1990)</u></b> |           |            |          |
| Freshmen:                              | 4 (12.5%) | Sophomore: | 3 (9.0%) |
| Junior:                                | 1 (5.6%)  | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)  | Total:     | 8 (9.1%) |
| <b><u>HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990)</u></b> |           |            |          |
| Freshmen:                              | 2 (5.3%)  | Sophomore: | 2 (6.3%) |
| Junior:                                | 0 (0.0%)  | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)  | Total:     | 4 (4.6%) |

**TABLE 5.2****Students Who Did Not Say What They Liked Least.**

| <b><u>HIST 1021 (FALL, 1989)</u></b>   |            |            |            |
|--|------------|------------|------------|
| Freshmen:                              | 23 (36.5%) | Sophomore: | 19 (41.3%) |
| Junior:                                | 6 (37.5%)  | Senior:    | 3 (50.0%)  |
| Other:                                 | 2 (66.7%)  | Total:     | 53 (39.5%) |
| <b><u>HIST 1022 (WINTER, 1990)</u></b> |            |            |            |
| Freshmen:                              | 12 (37.5%) | Sophomore: | 11 (33.3%) |
| Junior:                                | 4 (21.1%)  | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%)   |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)   | Total:     | 27 (30.7%) |
| <b><u>HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990)</u></b> |            |            |            |
| Freshmen:                              | 16 (42.2%) | Sophomore: | 15 (46.9%) |
| Junior:                                | 2 (33.3%)  | Senior:    | 1 (14.3%)  |
| Other:                                 | 2 (50.0%)  | Total:     | 36 (41.3%) |

One HIST 1022 student thought that the informal papers worked because “there was no pressure, and so I didn't feel stressed to write a really great paper, and they were fun to write. Then, when it came to writing the formal paper, I felt more relaxed.”

Likewise, a HIST 1023 student wrote: “The formal writings were not graded, thus the pressure to 'perform' was eliminated. We were encouraged to take a risk in our writing style and content. Specifically, to try to draw comparisons which might first seem non-related.” Others found the comparison and contrast papers good practice for the formal papers. A small percentage--not more than 15 percent--disliked not receiving a grade. (Table 14) Some said that they would have put in more effort if their assignments had been graded. They believed that a simple check mark was insufficient. One student suggested that the informal papers be given a “mock grade.”

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**TABLE 6**

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**What Students Liked Best: Assignments Relaxed and Ungraded.**

| <b><u>HIST 1021 (FALL, 1989)</u></b>   |            |            |            |
|--|------------|------------|------------|
| Freshmen:                              | 26 (41.3%) | Sophomore: | 18 (39.1%) |
| Junior:                                | 7 (43.6%)  | Senior:    | 1 (16.7%)  |
| Other:                                 | 2 (66.7%)  | Total:     | 54 (40.3%) |
| <b><u>HIST 1022 (WINTER, 1990)</u></b> |            |            |            |
| Freshmen:                              | 12 (37.5%) | Sophomore: | 12 (36.4%) |
| Junior:                                | 4 (21.0%)  | Senior:    | 2 (66.7%)  |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)   | Total:     | 30 (34.1%) |
| <b><u>HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990)</u></b> |            |            |            |
| Freshmen:                              | 12 (31.6%) | Sophomore: | 13 (40.7%) |
| Junior:                                | 2 (33.3%)  | Senior:    | 5 (71.4%)  |
| Other:                                 | 1 (25.0%)  | Total:     | 33 (37.9%) |

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Between 21 and 30 percent thought that informal assignments helped best with class discussion, with understanding course material, and with review. (Table 7)

Approximately 22 to 25 percent of student respondents liked best the selection of topics, the opportunity to express their opinions, and the exercise in analytical thinking. (Table

8) The students who cited these things as the informal's best feature enjoyed the



intellectual stimulation of the assignments. One freshman wanted the teaching staff to know of his genuine enthusiasm: “They were interesting. No, this isn't a 'Kiss Ass' comment, because you don't know my name; but I really did like the topic I picked.”

Another freshman liked the informal because it offered “a chance to write something in your own point of view instead of the endless objective test in other classes.” By means of the course writing, said another student, “we got a chance to interpret events instead of just memorizing historical facts.”

A small percentage of student respondents cited teacher comments as the best feature of the informal. (Table 9) In the evaluations for HIST 1023, one junior liked best that papers were based on source readings. A freshman liked most the focus on “ideology more than chronology.” (Table 11) A few students, either misreading the evaluation questionnaire or misunderstanding the place of the informal writing in the course, said that improvement of course grade was the best feature. (Table 10)

**TABLE 7**

**What Students Liked Best: Informal Helped with Class  
Discussions, with Understanding Course Material, and with Review.**

**HIST 1021 (FALL, 1989)**

|           |            |            |            |
|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| Freshmen: | 16 (25.4%) | Sophomore: | 17 (37.0%) |
| Junior:   | 4 (25.0%)  | Senior:    | 2 (33.3%)  |
| Other:    | 1 (33.3%)  | Total:     | 40 (29.9%) |

**HIST 1022 (WINTER, 1990)**

|           |            |            |            |
|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| Freshmen: | 6 (18.8%)  | Sophomore: | 11 (33.3%) |
| Junior:   | 8 (42.1%)  | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%)   |
| Other:    | 1 (100.0%) | Total:     | 19 (21.6%) |

**HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990)**

|           |           |            |            |
|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|
| Freshmen: | 8 (21.0%) | Sophomore: | 10 (31.2%) |
| Junior:   | 0 (0.0%)  | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%)   |
| Other:    | 2 (50.0%) | Total:     | 20 (23.0%) |

**TABLE 8****What Students Like Best: Topics, Opportunity to Express Opinion,  
Analytical Thinking.****HIST 1021 (FALL, 1989)**

|           |            |            |            |
|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| Freshmen: | 16 (25.4%) | Sophomore: | 8 (17.4%)  |
| Junior:   | 3 (18.8%)  | Senior:    | 2 (33.3%)  |
| Other:    | 0 (0.0%)   | Total:     | 29 (21.6%) |

**HIST 1022 (WINTER, 1990)**

|           |           |            |            |
|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|
| Freshmen: | 9 (28.1%) | Sophomore: | 6 (18.2%)  |
| Junior:   | 5 (26.3%) | Senior:    | 1 (33.3%)  |
| Other:    | 0 (0.0%)  | Total:     | 21 (23.9%) |

**HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990)**

|           |            |            |            |
|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| Freshmen: | 13 (34.2%) | Sophomore: | 5 (15.6%)  |
| Junior:   | 2 (33.3%)  | Senior:    | 1 (14.3%)  |
| Other:    | 1 (25.0%)  | Total:     | 22 (25.2%) |

**TABLE 9****What Students Liked Best: Instructor's Comments.****HIST 1021 (FALL, 1989)**

|           |          |            |          |
|-----------|----------|------------|----------|
| Freshmen: | 2 (3.2%) | Sophomore: | 1 (2.2%) |
| Junior:   | 1 (6.3%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:    | 0 (0.0%) | Total:     | 4 (2.9%) |

**HIST 1022 (WINTER, 1990)**

|           |          |            |          |
|-----------|----------|------------|----------|
| Freshmen: | 1 (3.1%) | Sophomore: | 0 (0.0%) |
| Junior:   | 1 (5.3%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:    | 0 (0.0%) | Total:     | 2 (2.3%) |

**HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990)**

|           |          |            |           |
|-----------|----------|------------|-----------|
| Freshmen: | 2 (5.3%) | Sophomore: | 1 (3.1%)  |
| Junior:   | 0 (0.0%) | Senior:    | 1 (14.3%) |
| Other:    | 0 (0.0%) | Total:     | 4 (4.6%)  |

**TABLE 10****What Students Liked Best: Improved Course Grade.**

| <b><u>HIST 1021 (FALL, 1989)</u></b>   |           |            |          |
|--|-----------|------------|----------|
| Freshmen:                              | 2 (3.2%)  | Sophomore: | 0 (0.0%) |
| Junior:                                | 0 (0.0%)  | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)  | Total:     | 2 (1.5%) |
| <b><u>HIST 1022 (WINTER, 1990)</u></b> |           |            |          |
| Freshmen:                              | 0 (0.0%)  | Sophomore: | 1 (3.0%) |
| Junior:                                | 0 (0.0%)  | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)  | Total:     | 1 (1.2%) |
| <b><u>HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990)</u></b> |           |            |          |
| Freshmen:                              | 0 (0.0%)  | Sophomore: | 1 (3.1%) |
| Junior:                                | 1 (16.7%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)  | Total:     | 2 (2.3%) |

**TABLE 11****What Students Liked Best: Other Responses.****HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990): ASSIGNMENTS BASED ON SOURCE READINGS.**

|           |           |            |          |
|-----------|-----------|------------|----------|
| Freshmen: | 0 (0.0%)  | Sophomore: | 0 (0.0%) |
| Junior:   | 1 (16.7%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:    | 0 (0.0%)  | Total:     | 1 (1.2%) |

**HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990): ASSIGNMENTS DEALT WITH "IDEOLOGY MORE THAN CHRONOLOGY."**

|           |          |            |          |
|-----------|----------|------------|----------|
| Freshmen: | 1 (2.6%) | Sophomore: | 0 (0.0%) |
| Junior:   | 0 (0.0%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:    | 0 (0.0%) | Total:     | 1 (1.2%) |

Students were a bit more varied in what they liked least about informal writing. Of the 59 to 69 percent of respondents who answered this question, approximately 18 to 20 percent disliked most writing and typing the assignments; (Table 12) yet some still admitted that the writing was worthwhile. "I just hate writing," wrote one student, "but it sure was good for me to go through the process." Between 8 to 10 percent of respondents

thought that the assignments were unclear or complicated (Table 13); roughly 6 to 15 percent resented the lack of a grade (Table 14); and about six to seven percent liked least the time it took to do the assignments. (Table 15) In HIST 1021, which had two informal assignments, 4.5 percent of respondents mentioned too few informal papers as the worst feature. The percentage of respondents who felt this way declined slightly after informal assignments increased to three. (Table 16) Between approximately two and four percent thought the one to two page length of the assignments to be the worst feature. (Table 17) Other dislikes were cited by smaller numbers of respondents, of less than three percent and usually representing about one percent of respondents. These responses are summarized in Tables 18-18.6 and Table 19.

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**TABLE 12**

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**What Students Disliked: Writing and Typing Assignments.**

| <b><u>HIST 1021 (FALL, 1989)</u></b>   |            |            |            |
|--|------------|------------|------------|
| Freshmen:                              | 13 (20.6%) | Sophomore: | 8 (17.4%)  |
| Junior:                                | 4 (25.0%)  | Senior:    | 2 (33.3%)  |
| Other:                                 | 1 (33.3%)  | Total:     | 27 (20.1%) |
| <b><u>HIST 1022 (WINTER, 1990)</u></b> |            |            |            |
| Freshmen:                              | 7 (21.9%)  | Sophomore: | 7 (21.2%)  |
| Junior:                                | 0 (0.0%)   | Senior:    | 3 (100.0%) |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)   | Total:     | 17 (19.3%) |
| <b><u>HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990)</u></b> |            |            |            |
| Freshmen:                              | 6 (15.8%)  | Sophomore: | 9 (28.2%)  |
| Junior:                                | 0 (0.0%)   | Senior:    | 1 (14.3%)  |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)   | Total:     | 16 (18.4%) |

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TABLE 13

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**What Students Liked Least: Assignments Unclear and Complicated.**

| <b><u>HIST 1021 (FALL, 1989)</u></b>   |           |            |           |
|--|-----------|------------|-----------|
| Freshmen:                              | 7 (11.1%) | Sophomore: | 4 (8.7%)  |
| Junior:                                | 2 (12.5%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%)  |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)  | Total:     | 13 (9.7%) |
| <b><u>HIST 1022 (WINTER, 1990)</u></b> |           |            |           |
| Freshmen:                              | 1 (3.2%)  | Sophomore: | 3 (9.0%)  |
| Junior:                                | 3 (15.8%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%)  |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)  | Total:     | 7 (7.8%)  |
| <b><u>HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990)</u></b> |           |            |           |
| Freshmen:                              | 5 (13.2%) | Sophomore: | 2 (6.3%)  |
| Junior:                                | 0 (0.0%)  | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%)  |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)  | Total:     | 7 (8.0%)  |

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TABLE 14

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**What Students Liked Least: Assignments Not Graded.**

| <b><u>HIST 1021 (FALL, 1989)</u></b>   |           |            |            |
|--|-----------|------------|------------|
| Freshmen:                              | 4 (6.3%)  | Sophomore: | 4 (8.7%)   |
| Junior:                                | 0 (0.0%)  | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%)   |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)  | Total:     | 8 (6.0%)   |
| <b><u>HIST 1022 (WINTER, 1990)</u></b> |           |            |            |
| Freshmen:                              | 4 (12.5%) | Sophomore: | 4 (12.1%)  |
| Junior:                                | 5 (26.3%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%)   |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)  | Total:     | 13 (14.8%) |
| <b><u>HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990)</u></b> |           |            |            |
| Freshmen:                              | 2 (5.3%)  | Sophomore: | 1 (3.1%)   |
| Junior:                                | 1 (16.7%) | Senior:    | 1 (14.3%)  |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)  | Total:     | 5 (5.7%)   |

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TABLE 15

**What Students Like Least: Time Involved in Preparing Assignments.**

| <b><u>HIST 1021 (FALL, 1989)</u></b>   |            |            |           |
|--|------------|------------|-----------|
| Freshmen:                              | 4 (6.3%)   | Sophomore: | 4 (8.7%)  |
| Junior:                                | 0 (0.0%)   | Senior:    | 1 (16.7%) |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)   | Total:     | 9 (6.7%)  |
| <b><u>HIST 1022 (WINTER, 1990)</u></b> |            |            |           |
| Freshmen:                              | 1 (3.1%)   | Sophomore: | 1 (3.0%)  |
| Junior:                                | 2 (10.5%)  | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%)  |
| Other:                                 | 1 (100.0%) | Total:     | 5 (5.7%)  |
| <b><u>HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990)</u></b> |            |            |           |
| Freshmen:                              | 5 (13.2%)  | Sophomore: | 2 (6.3%)  |
| Junior:                                | 0 (0.0%)   | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%)  |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)   | Total:     | 7 (8.0%)  |

TABLE 16

**What Students Liked Least: Few Numbers of Informal.**

| <b><u>HIST 1021 (FALL, 1989)</u></b>   |          |            |          |
|--|----------|------------|----------|
| Freshmen:                              | 5 (7.9%) | Sophomore: | 0 (0.0%) |
| Junior:                                | 1 (6.3%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%) | Total:     | 6 (4.5%) |
| <b><u>HIST 1022 (WINTER, 1990)</u></b> |          |            |          |
| Freshmen:                              | 0 (0.0%) | Sophomore: | 3 (9.1%) |
| Junior:                                | 0 (0.0%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%) | Total:     | 3 (3.4%) |
| <b><u>HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990)</u></b> |          |            |          |
| Freshmen:                              | 1 (2.6%) | Sophomore: | 1 (3.1%) |
| Junior:                                | 0 (0.0%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%) | Total:     | 2 (2.3%) |

**TABLE 17****What Students Liked Least: One to Two Page Length Too Short.**

| <b><u>HIST 1021 (FALL, 1989)</u></b>   |           |            |          |
|--|-----------|------------|----------|
| Freshmen:                              | 3 (4.8%)  | Sophomore: | 1 (2.2%) |
| Junior:                                | 1 (6.6%)  | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)  | Total:     | 5 (3.7%) |
| <b><u>HIST 1022 (WINTER, 1990)</u></b> |           |            |          |
| Freshmen:                              | 0 (0.0%)  | Sophomore: | 1 (3.0%) |
| Junior:                                | 2 (10.5%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)  | Total:     | 3 (3.4%) |
| <b><u>HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990)</u></b> |           |            |          |
| Freshmen:                              | 1 (2.6%)  | Sophomore: | 0 (0.0%) |
| Junior:                                | 0 (0.0%)  | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:                                 | 1 (25.0%) | Total:     | 2 (2.3%) |

**TABLE 18.1****What Students Liked Least:  
Assignments Seemed Irrelevant to Other Course Work and Exams.**

| <b><u>HIST 1021 (FALL, 1989)</u></b>   |           |            |          |
|--|-----------|------------|----------|
| Freshmen:                              | 0 (0.0%)  | Sophomore: | 3 (6.5%) |
| Junior:                                | 1 (6.3%)  | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)  | Total:     | 4 (2.9%) |
| <b><u>HIST 1022 (WINTER, 1990)</u></b> |           |            |          |
| Freshmen:                              | 0 (0.0%)  | Sophomore: | 1 (3.0%) |
| Junior:                                | 0 (6.3%)  | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)  | Total:     | 1 (1.1%) |
| <b><u>HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990)</u></b> |           |            |          |
| Freshmen:                              | 1 (2.6%)  | Sophomore: | 0 (0.0%) |
| Junior:                                | 1 (16.7%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)  | Total:     | 2 (2.3%) |

TABLE 18.2

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**What Students Liked Least: Assignment Due Dates.**

| <b><u>HIST 1021 (FALL, 1989)</u></b>   |          |            |          |
|--|----------|------------|----------|
| Freshmen:                              | 0 (0.0%) | Sophomore: | 1 (2.3%) |
| Junior:                                | 1 (6.3%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%) | Total:     | 2 (1.5%) |
| <b><u>HIST 1022 (WINTER, 1990)</u></b> |          |            |          |
| Freshmen:                              | 1 (3.1%) | Sophomore: | 0 (0.0%) |
| Junior:                                | 0 (0.0%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%) | Total:     | 1 (1.1%) |
| <b><u>HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990)</u></b> |          |            |          |
| Freshmen:                              | 1 (2.6%) | Sophomore: | 0 (0.0%) |
| Junior:                                | 0 (0.0%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%) | Total:     | 1 (1.2%) |

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TABLE 18.3

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**What Students Liked Least: Choice of Topics.**

| <b><u>HIST 1021 (FALL, 1989)</u></b>   |          |            |           |
|--|----------|------------|-----------|
| Freshmen:                              | 1 (1.6%) | Sophomore: | 0 (0.0%)  |
| Junior:                                | 0 (0.0%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%)  |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%) | Total:     | 1 (0.7%)  |
| <b><u>HIST 1022 (WINTER, 1990)</u></b> |          |            |           |
| Freshmen:                              | 0 (0.0%) | Sophomore: | 1 (3.0%)  |
| Junior:                                | 0 (0.0%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%)  |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%) | Total:     | 1 (1.1%)  |
| <b><u>HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990)</u></b> |          |            |           |
| Freshmen:                              | 0 (0.0%) | Sophomore: | 1 (3.1%)  |
| Junior:                                | 0 (0.0%) | Senior:    | 1 (14.3%) |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%) | Total:     | 2 (2.3%)  |

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**TABLE 18.4****What Students Liked Least: Too Many Informal Assignments.**

| <b><u>HIST 1021 (FALL, 1989)</u></b>   |           |            |          |
|--|-----------|------------|----------|
| Freshmen:                              | 0 (0.0%)  | Sophomore: | 1 (2.3%) |
| Junior:                                | 0 (0.0%)  | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)  | Total:     | 1 (0.7%) |
| <b><u>HIST 1022 (WINTER, 1990)</u></b> |           |            |          |
| Freshmen:                              | 0 (0.0%)  | Sophomore: | 1 (3.0%) |
| Junior:                                | 0 (0.0%)  | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)  | Total:     | 1 (1.1%) |
| <b><u>HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990)</u></b> |           |            |          |
| Freshmen:                              | 0 (0.0%)  | Sophomore: | 0 (0.0%) |
| Junior:                                | 1 (16.7%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%)  | Total:     | 1 (1.2%) |

**TABLE 18.5****What Students Liked Least:  
TA Comments on Grammar, Style, and Content.**

| <b><u>HIST 1021 (FALL, 1989)</u></b>   |          |            |          |
|--|----------|------------|----------|
| Freshmen:                              | 3 (4.8%) | Sophomore: | 1 (2.2%) |
| Junior:                                | 0 (0.0%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%) | Total:     | 4 (2.9%) |
| <b><u>HIST 1022 (WINTER, 1990)</u></b> |          |            |          |
| Freshmen:                              | 1 (3.2%) | Sophomore: | 0 (2.2%) |
| Junior:                                | 0 (0.0%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:                                 | 0 (0.0%) | Total:     | 1 (1.1%) |

TABLE 18.6

**What Students Liked Least: Assignments Were Too Easy.****HIST 1022 (WINTER, 1990)**

|           |          |            |          |
|-----------|----------|------------|----------|
| Freshmen: | 1 (3.1%) | Sophomore: | 0 (0.0%) |
| Junior:   | 0 (0.0%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:    | 0 (0.0%) | Total:     | 1 (1.1%) |

**HISTORY 1023 (SPRING, 1990)**

|           |          |            |          |
|-----------|----------|------------|----------|
| Freshmen: | 1 (2.6%) | Sophomore: | 0 (0.0%) |
| Junior:   | 0 (0.0%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:    | 0 (0.0%) | Total:     | 1 (1.2%) |

TABLE 19

**What Students Liked Least: Other Responses.****HIST 1022 (WINTER, 1990) : NO REWRITE FOR INFORMAL ASSIGNMENTS.**

|           |          |            |          |
|-----------|----------|------------|----------|
| Freshmen: | 1 (3.1%) | Sophomore: | 0 (0.0%) |
| Junior:   | 0 (0.0%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:    | 0 (0.0%) | Total:     | 1 (1.1%) |

**HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990) : LACK OF TA COMMENTS.**

|           |          |            |           |
|-----------|----------|------------|-----------|
| Freshmen: | 0 (0.0%) | Sophomore: | 0 (0.0%)  |
| Junior:   | 0 (0.0%) | Senior:    | 2 (28.5%) |
| Other:    | 0 (0.0%) | Total:     | 2 (2.3%)  |

**HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990) : CLASS PRESENTATIONS OF INFORMAL WRITINGS.**

|           |          |            |          |
|-----------|----------|------------|----------|
| Freshmen: | 1 (2.6%) | Sophomore: | 0 (0.0%) |
| Junior:   | 0 (0.0%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:    | 0 (0.0%) | Total:     | 1 (1.2%) |

**HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990): COURSE READINGS USED IN INFORMAL ASSIGNMENTS**

|           |          |            |          |
|-----------|----------|------------|----------|
| Freshmen: | 1 (2.6%) | Sophomore: | 1 (3.1%) |
| Junior:   | 0 (0.0%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:    | 0 (0.0%) | Total:     | 2 (1.2%) |

**HIST 1023 (SPRING, 1990) : LACK OF CLASS DISCUSSION.**

|           |           |            |          |
|-----------|-----------|------------|----------|
| Freshmen: | 0 (0.0%)  | Sophomore: | 1 (3.1%) |
| Junior:   | 1 (16.7%) | Senior:    | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other:    | 0 (0.0%)  | Total:     | 2 (1.2%) |

“Prewriting,” wrote Professor Breihan, “is an aid to better formal writing and history comprehension.”<sup>23</sup> Most of the students and teaching staff of “Introduction to Western Civilization” at Minnesota seemed to agree with him. Informal assignments were most practical in the discipline they imposed on the students. The note taking and lecture summary exercises helped students organize information and identify essential points. Analytical assignments taught students how to critically read historical sources and how to interpret evidence. These assignments encouraged students to take an active part in studying and writing about the past. Many students liked the intellectual challenge of the assignments. Informal papers also helped students learn the rhetoric of history and how to develop an argument around a thesis statement. These writing skills will benefit not only those students who go on to take upper division and graduate history courses but also students who study in other disciplines.

The writing component created a demanding course for both students and TAs. Was it worthwhile? Of the seven TAs who taught at least one quarter-sequence, only one thought not; the others believed that the writing benefited most students. The approach to teaching historical writing as a process by means of three informal papers and one formal paper with rewrite worked best. On the other hand, many students, with their hedonic calculus, prefer classes in which they can get the highest grade for the least amount of time and effort. This seemed to be one reason for the steady decline of enrollments in HIST 1021, 1022, and 1023. The demands of a history writing course at the introductory level will discourage many students unless such courses are required as part of a “writing across the curriculum” program. Still, the best way to improve history papers at the upper division and graduate courses is to initiate students into the process of historical writing

at the introductory level. If viewed in this context, then the use of informal with formal writing in comprehensive history survey courses is worthwhile.

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11. Henry Steffens, "Journals in the Teaching of History," in The Journal Book, ed. Toby Fulwiler (Portsmouth, NH: 1987): 220-21; Reber, "Teaching Undergraduates to Think Like Historians," 19.
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13. Keightley, "Improving Student Writing Skills in a History Lecture Course," 171.
14. Breihan, "Prewriting in College History Courses," 20-21.

15. C. B. Culpin, "Language, Learning, and Thinking Skills in History," Teaching History 39(1984): 24-28.
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  17. "Language and History Teaching," 15.
  18. Steffens and Dickerson, Writer's Guide: History, 19.
  19. HIST 1021, the first quarter sequence, covering the Ancient Near East to Charlemagne, was taught by Professor James Tracy. HIST 1022, Professor Barbara Hanawalt taught the period from The Feudal Era to the Religious Wars. Professor David Kieft taught the final sequence, HIST 1023, continuing the course from the Age of Absolutism to the Present.
  20. The text for the course was Mortimer Chambers et al, The Western Experience, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (New York, 1987) .The series "Classics of Western Thought," edited by Thomas H. Greer, provided the source readings. HIST 1021 used The Ancient World, ed. Donald S. Gochberg, 4th ed., (San Diego and New York, 1988); The Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Reformation, ed. Karl F. Thompson, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (San Diego and New York, 1988) was used in HIST 1022. The Modern World, ed. Edgar E. Knoebel, 4th ed., (San Diego and New York, 1988) was used in HIST 1023. Additional readings were also assigned: Einhard, Life of Charlemagne (Ann Arbor, 1960) for 1021; Eileen Power, Medieval People, 10th ed., (New York, 1964) for 1022; and Dennis Sherman, Western Civilization: Images and Interpretation, 2nd ed., (New York, 1986), vol. 2, for 1023. Sherman's collection combines brief excerpts from primary sources with interpretations of modern historians.
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