

Fostering Student Interests in Projects via Specialized Streams at Trinity College Dublin

In the History Group Projects course (HI2000) at Trinity College Dublin, students have an opportunity to take part in **project work depending on their research interests** over a whole academic year. Each year, there are three distinct research streams available for students to select from. The research streams cover a wide area of history and students are expected to develop their own research topics in the streams across different types of history and different time and spaces. Students who wish to carry out this research project would rank their research stream preference at the end of the first year, and complete the project within their second year of study. Each group has a **mentor** who specialises in the selected research stream, and who will supervise the

project and monitor the students' progress. Students work closely with the mentor, and meet with the mentor regularly. This course aims at offering students an opportunity to undertake directed research in a structured manner, developing student-centered learning and training students' skills in working in groups.

Distinctive Features:

- ✔ Providing an opportunity for undergraduate students to carry out research projects under supervision and in a structured manner;
- ✔ Allowing students to conduct research according to their research interests;
- ✔ Mentorship with experts of the chosen research streams

Designed Learning Outcomes (LO):

- I. Ability to contribute to the design and implementation of a group research project.
- II. Be able to identify and evaluate source materials, and produce an individual synthesis of source materials.
- III. Capacity to work within a group and contribute to allocation of tasks.
- IV. Be able to contribute to a group presentation and the completion of a research portfolio.

Source: Trinity College Dublin, The University of Dublin (2017b) HI2000 History Group Projects Handbook

Coursework Teaching & Learning Activities:

- ✍ Induction (Week 1 of Term 1): introductory meetings for mentors and students; discussion of possible project topics and available resources;
- ✍ Mentor meetings (at least 3 in Term 1; 3 in Term 2): 30-minute meetings between mentors and students; mentors sign off on project proposals during one of the meetings held in week 8 in Term 1
- ✍ Group meetings (at least 7 hours over the year): meetings held by group members without their mentors
- ✍ Presentations (end of Term 2): groups in the same research stream gather to give presentations in a 2-hour session

Assessment Approaches

Name	Learning Activities	Weight	Aligned LO	Type	Generic Skills
A1 Presentation	Each student group presents their project to the other groups in their own research stream at the end of the course. The presentation normally lasts for 30 minutes, with 25-minute presentation time and a 5-minute of questioning session.	50%	I. II. III. IV.	Summative	Collaboration; Communication; Creativity; Critical Thinking
A2 Essay	A 2,500-word exposition should be submitted by each student individually. Each essay should be about one particular aspect of the group project, such as an analysis of a particular historical problem or event within the wider research question being investigated.	40%	II.	Summative	Communication; Critical Thinking; Study Skills

A3	Group Portfolio	The group portfolio is composed of two components, research materials and progress journal. For the first section, students should list out research materials used in the research, including bibliographies, plan, outline, lists of research questions, and work schedules of all group members. They should also indicate which group members are responsible for the materials included. On the other hand, the progress journal mainly consists of brief meeting descriptions. Descriptions should include attendance, summaries of meeting proceedings, task allocations, and lists of completed tasks since previous meetings. All group members are responsible for both components.	10%	I. III. IV.	Formative	Collaboration; Communication; Self-management
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Assessment Type

Two summative assessment methods are employed in this course to assess research quality and students’ understanding of the research topics. Formative assessment is also used to ensure student engagement and encourage self-assessment.

Assessment Focal Areas

Holistic competencies: All assessments in this course emphasize on students’ holistic competencies. Throughout the whole research project, students are required to work in groups and they are not allowed to choose their own group members. Each group needs to complete the presentation (A1) and the group portfolio (A3) together, entailing that there is a high expectation on students’ collaboration and communication skills. Critical thinking is another focus in the assessment in this course. For the presentation (A1) and the essay (A2), students are given the task to critically analyze and address historical issues, which can develop and assess their critical thinking skill.

Student-centered learning: This course is distinguished with a high level of student-centered and research-informed learning. Mentors only play a

supervisory role and students have to organize their own team meetings and take care of their work progress. In the presentation (A1) and the essay (A2), the final product of students’ self-learning, the research outcomes are examined. In the group portfolio (A3), students are required to submit a progress journal, i.e. a documentation of meeting descriptions. This can ensure student engagement and participation in the process of self-learning.

Historical research ability: The assessment of students’ historical research skill is among the most important in this course. The portfolio (A3), as a formative assessment, assesses students’ research skills of locating relevant and reliable sources, forming research questions, and developing research plan etc. The presentation (A1), in the meantime, assesses students’ research outcome and research quality.

Assessment Standards/ Sample Rubrics

Rubrics of this course are not available, but there are assessment standards of presentation (A1).

	Areas	Marking Criteria
A1. Presentation	Quality of Research	In the presentation, groups should list out clearly the sources they have used, and should evaluate the sources in terms of e.g. quality, relevance, reliability and validity.
	Integration of Project	The presentation should demonstrate how each member’s research has been integrated into the overall project, instead of presenting loosely connected items. Group members should offer analysis and not just information, and aim to address an issue or a problem or construct integrated arguments.

Manner of Presentation

Both oral and visual clarity of the presentation are very important for the delivery of aims, findings and significance of the projects. A good time management, appropriate pace of delivery, the use of well-chosen, relevant and effective visual materials, an organized structure of presentation and effective response to questions are factors contributing to oral and visual clarity.

Source: Trinity College Dublin, The University of Dublin (2017b) HI2000 History Group Projects Handbook

Teacher's Stories

Dr. Robert Armstrong, Associate Professor in History, Trinity College Dublin

Professional Engagements

Robert Armstrong is the module coordinator of this research-informed History course. His research

interest lies in early modern Ireland and Britain, focusing on religious, political and intellectual History of the 17th century. He is member of the Irish Historical Society, the Ecclesiastical History Society and the Irish Association of Professional Historians.

Students' Side of Stories

✔ Not available

Featured Video

▶ not available

References

Trinity College Dublin, The University of Dublin (2017a). HI2000 History Group Projects. Retrieved from <http://www.tcd.ie/history/undergraduate/modules/freshman/historygroupprojects/index.php> (accessed 29 Mar 2018)

Trinity College Dublin, The University of Dublin (2017b). HI2000 History Group Projects Handbook. Retrieved from <http://www.tcd.ie/history/assets/pdf/ug/HistoryGroupProjectshandbook.pdf> (accessed 29 Mar 2018)