The Newark History Department has engaged in the most ambitious and successful assessment initiative of any FASN department. In 2013-2014, History evaluated student achievement of 4 of the 8 core curriculum learning objectives across 26 sections of History core curriculum courses, using direct measures (rubric scoring of both early and late semester assignments), qualitative instructor self-review of course effectiveness in student achievement of specific learning goals, and teaching observations of new instructors focused specifically on the adequacy of teaching in relation to core curriculum learning goals. The multiple measures converged in revealing that while core courses were adequately and consistently meeting most of the core curriculum learning objectives, students consistently struggled in the area of “critical reading and thinking.” Similarly, History majors, whose performance was assessed via rubric scoring of History’s capstone seminar paper, consistently struggled with drawing on secondary source material in framing their analysis of primary sources and/or with analyzing primary source data. Note that these learning goals are higher-level, major-specific versions of the critical reading and writing learning goal History identified as a weakness for students in core curriculum courses. History also compared performance of majors and students in core classes on the same critical reading and analysis rubric, finding that majors only very slightly out-performed core curriculum students.

Based on these data, during 2014-2015, History required that all core curriculum instructors (frequently PTLs) focus explicitly on developing students’ critical reading and analysis skills in their course content and to assess performance on two assignments, one toward the beginning and one toward the end of the semester. This strategy proved to be quite effective, resulting in a striking improvement in students’ achievement of this learning objective by the end of the semester across core classes. History also created and piloted a new methods course within the History major, Perspectives in History, to hone majors’ ability to engage more effectively with primary and secondary sources in preparation for the senior capstone. Rubric evaluation of 5 assignments, as well as in-depth qualitative analysis of the performance of 4 individual students over the course of the semester, demonstrated dramatic improvement in most students’ awareness of primary source value and ability to cross-reference within texts. Based on these data, they are strongly considering the adoption of this class as a new required prerequisite for their senior capstone course.