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Richard Hughes
Illinois State University

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Illinois Council of Social Studies



“Preparing History Teachers and Scholars?: Content Exams and Teacher Certification from the Progressive Era to the Age of Accountability”

Richard L. Hughes

Illinois State University

Each year hundreds of future secondary history teachers in Illinois spend a Saturday morning answering 120 multiple-choice questions on the state-mandated *Social Science: History* exam. About seventy of the questions address American, World, or Illinois history including one section, presumably comprised of only six or seven questions, dedicated to “basic historical terms and concepts, comparative history, and the interpretive nature of history.” The state of Illinois certifies teachers in history and six social sciences thus the remainder of the exam (approximately 40%) includes questions from the social sciences.¹ Despite the efforts of college professors to assess student learning through research papers, essay exams, and other assignments, the ability of college students to graduate and become certified to teach history hinges on a passing score on a small number of multiple-choice questions. The overlooked story of how standardized testing came to shape the certification of history teachers, as well as instructors in other disciplines, throughout the nation began at least 80 years before federal legislation such as *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB). Used in almost every state, such exams undermine the work of historians in teacher education and promote a narrow view of the discipline that emphasizes consensus and historical facts at the expense of diversity and historical thinking. The exams also highlight the persistent problem of preparing history teachers in an educational climate that has long asked more of its students than its teachers.

In recent decades proponents of history education such as the Bradley Commission for History in the Schools have outlined the inadequacy of a teacher education curriculum that often

The author would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for the *Councilor* for their helpful feedback.

¹ Illinois Certification Testing System, Study Guide- “Social Science: History (114),” National Evaluation Systems, Inc. 2004, www.icts.nesinc.com. Although the exam is not available to the public, the published study guide and related exam information provide a sense of the exam’s four subareas and eighteen sets of objectives.



marginalizes courses in history. In 1989 Kenneth and Barbara Jackson argued for “a return to more history-centered curriculum.”² A decade later, Diane Ravitch offered an extensive analysis of the educational background of secondary history teachers. Ravitch concluded that the troubling trend of “out of field teaching” – instructors teaching history without either a college major or minor in the discipline – dominated much of history education. The solution to what Ravitch described as “professional malpractice” was a curriculum in teacher education centered on the discipline of history.³ In these and other studies the crux of the problem for history education was the pernicious legacy of the nebulous social studies curriculum since the 1920s. Recommendations included curriculum reform that emphasized history at the expense of education courses in the social studies and, more recently, criticism of the standards of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) as, according to Sam Wineburg, so broad and unrealistic as to “invite ridicule and scorn.”⁴ Since then history departments, professional organizations such as the Organization of American Historians (OAH), the American Historical Association (AHA), the National Council for History Education (NCHE), museums such as Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, and even the federal government have begun to take seriously the role of historians in preparing history teachers and improving student learning in K-12 education.⁵

² Kenneth Jackson and Barbara Jackson, “Why the Time is Right to Reform the History Curriculum,” in Paul Gagnon, ed., *Historical Literacy; The Case for History in American Education* (New York, 1989) 3-15.

³ Diane Ravitch, “The Educational Backgrounds of History Teachers” in Peter Stearns et al. eds., *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, (New York, 2000) 143-155; Diane Ravitch, “Who Prepares Our History Teachers? Who Should Prepare Our History Teachers?” *History Teacher*, 31, no.4 (August 1998): 495-503.

⁴ Wineburg, Sam, “What Does NCATE Have to Say to Future History Teachers? Not Much.” *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 2005, 658-665.

⁵ “The Next Generation of History Teachers: A Challenge to Departments of History,” American Historical Association, <http://www.historians.org/pubs/Free/historyteaching/index.htm>; Fritz Fischer, “Preparation of Future History Teachers: The History Department’s Role,” *Perspectives*, American Historical Association, December 2006, <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2006/0612/0612tea1.cfm>; Laurie Westhoff, “The Historian’s Role in Teacher Education,” *Perspectives*, American Historical Association, September 2006, <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2006/0609/0609tea1.cfm>; Kathleen A. Steeves, “Working Together to Strengthen History Teaching in Secondary Schools,” American Historical Association, www.historians.org/pubs/Free/StrengtheningSecondaryTeaching.htm; For the role of the federal government in history education, see the program for Teaching American History grants, <http://www.ed.gov/programs/teachinghistory/index.html>.



Unfortunately, the increased commitment to guaranteeing a “substantial program in history” for future generations of history teachers failed to address the reality that standardized testing, developed in the 1920s and entrenched in the current educational climate of accountability and accreditation, serves as the official, albeit inadequate, assessment of content knowledge.⁶ It is tempting to think of this reliance on standardized testing to evaluate the content knowledge of prospective teachers as a consequence of the controversial *No Child Left Behind* or NCLB (2002). Although states currently use such exams to designate “highly qualified” teachers for NCLB, the evangelical zeal for standardized content exams originated in the twenties and illuminates the evolving and troubling role of history within teacher education. According to Nicholas Lemann, concern about the state of college education after World War I fell into three broad categories: progressive educators such as John Dewey who challenged the rigid instruction and curricula of the nineteenth century, those who wanted to use IQ tests to measure college aptitude and expand college enrollment, and individuals such as Ben Wood, an education professor at Columbia’s Teacher College, who believed in the power of standardized testing to measure specific content knowledge. A pioneer in standardized testing, Wood directed Columbia’s Bureau of Collegiate Educational Research and was later responsible for establishing the IBM Watson Computer Laboratory at the university. Wood hoped to “establish a body of material that all students in high school and college should be required to master, test them on it, and ruthlessly weed out the student population on the basis of the test results.”⁷

Wood’s commitment to what he referred to as “content examining” originated soon after World War I as part of a confluence of three factors still relevant to recent questions about how government-mandated standardized testing came to dominate the assessment of history teachers. First, the War Department, according to Wood, “invaded the halls of Columbia College” with the Students’ Army Training Corps intelligence exam, a test that Wood had administered as a psychologist in the military a few years earlier. The federal government’s experience building an army during World War I “changed the whole outlook” on campus and soon thereafter Columbia began using a similar exam as part of the admissions process.⁸ Second, the impetus for assessing content through standardized exams came not from historians but from administrators and

⁶ Bradley Commission on History in the Schools, “Building a History Curriculum: Guidelines for Teaching History in Schools,” in Gagnon, *Historical Literacy*, 19.

⁷ Nicholas Lemann, *The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy* (New York, 1999) 2; Joan F. Brennan, *The IBM Watson Laboratory at Columbia University; a History* (New York, 1971) 1-5.

⁸ Ben D. Wood, *Measurement in Higher Education* (Yonkers-on-Hudson, N.Y., 1932) 15, 177.



educational researchers such as Wood in the Teacher's College. Finally, historians with little interest or experience in standardized testing soon discovered that the initial use of such exams at Columbia centered not on math or science curriculum but on courses in world and American history. The "Columbia Experiment" with standardized exams in courses began in 1921 as freshmen enrolled in *Contemporary Civilizations* encountered for the first time 139 multiple-choice questions, a dozen fill-in-the-blank questions, and over sixty "Recognition" questions that asked students to underline correct terms. The following year Columbia students in U.S. history faced eighty True-False questions that were scored mechanically. Members of the history faculty, while initially skeptical, recognized the value of the exams in terms of time and money and yet cautioned that standardized exams lacked the ability of essay exams to assess a "students' power of accurate and cogent expression, and his ability to organize material."⁹

While aptitude tests for college entrance evolved into the current use of the Scholastic Aptitude Test or SAT, Wood's faith in measuring specific content knowledge remains far more important to teacher education in the twenty-first century. In 1938, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching published a ten-year study coauthored by Wood and William Learned entitled, "The Student and His Knowledge." The study was an ambitious attempt to test over 45,000 high school and college students throughout Pennsylvania beginning in 1928. Although the groundbreaking research project aimed to map the "intellectual geography" of an entire generation of students, the results were especially valuable for teacher education.¹⁰ In what the headline in the *New York Times* summarized as, "Teachers-To-Be Inferior," the study concluded that teacher education candidates, especially those trained at so-called teacher colleges, scored significantly lower in content knowledge than their counterparts in colleges of arts and sciences.¹¹ Moreover, the scores for future teachers were often so low that *Harpers Magazine* concluded that a "surprising number" of the "flesh-and-blood" teachers identified in the study were "not as well-educated as their brighter pupils."¹²

⁹ Wood, 12, 178, 201, 262.

¹⁰ William S. Learned and Ben D. Wood, *The Student and His Knowledge: A Report to the Carnegie Foundation of the Results of the High School and College Examinations of 1928, 1930, and 1932*, (New York, 1938) xvi-xvii, 64-65.

¹¹ "Colleges Assailed in Carnegie Study," *New York Times*, April 11, 1938, 17.

¹² Gove Hambidge, "Toward a New Design for Education," *Harpers Magazine*, October 1938, 514-21.



The study and the reaction to its findings reflected the transitional nature of higher education, especially teacher education, in the early twentieth century. By the 1920s research universities dominated an emerging hierarchy within higher education in the United States that left little room for normal schools which had been charged with training teachers since the mid nineteenth century. By the time Wood and others began constructing standardized tests for content knowledge normal schools suffered from a reputation for remedial education and an emphasis on professional methodology at the expense of the intellectual rigor of the liberal arts. The result was that normal schools throughout the nation became teachers colleges with a broader curriculum that included upper division courses and baccalaureate degrees. Schools in Normal, Carbondale, Charleston, McComb, and DeKalb transitioned to teachers colleges by the 1920s and in Pennsylvania, the state at the center of the Carnegie study, thirteen normal schools expanded to teachers colleges in 1927 and 1928.¹³

As historian Charles Harper argued as early as 1935, the central question of teacher education during the demise of normal schools and the growth of standardized testing was who should be responsible for the training of prospective secondary teachers. Research universities, who increasingly shaped educational policy and accreditation on the state level, remained skeptical if not hostile about the ability of teachers colleges to address subjects such as history. Illinois State Normal University lost its accreditation in 1930 and, in addition to having no historians with doctorates on faculty, offered only a Bachelor's in Education with few specific required courses in the discipline.¹⁴ Not surprisingly, liberal arts colleges and larger schools such as the University of Illinois initiated limited efforts to expand its role in teacher education as the demand for secondary teachers grew rapidly. Coupled with what John Freed characterized as "curricular fragmentation" due in part to the expanded the role of electives in higher education, teacher education appeared increasingly political, chaotic, and in need of rational reform and measurable standards to ensure that teachers were qualified to teach the academic content of high schools. Not unlike our contemporary culture, anxiety about both higher and secondary education in the

¹³ Christine A. Ogren, *The American State Normal School: "An Instrument of Great Good,"* New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005) 202; John Freed, *Educating Illinois: Illinois State University, 1857-2007* (Normal, Illinois: Illinois State University, 2009) 160-208.

¹⁴ Charles, Harper, *Development of the Teachers College in the United States with special reference to the Illinois State Normal University* (Bloomington, 1939) Preface, unnumbered p. iii-iv. Illinois State Normal University, the state's oldest normal school, did not establish a department of history or a substantial general education curriculum until the 1960s. For decades a department of social science remained a legacy of the normal school. For more, see Freed, 161-173, 199-203.



1920s fueled criticism of the teaching profession and an increased interest in using the allegedly scientific assessment of standardized testing.

STUDY OF THE RELATIONS OF SECONDARY AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN
PENNSYLVANIA

THE STUDENT AND HIS KNOWLEDGE

A REPORT TO THE CARNEGIE FOUNDATION ON THE RESULTS
OF THE HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE EXAMINATIONS OF
1928, 1930, AND 1932

BY WILLIAM S. LEARNED

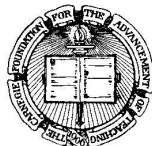
STAFF MEMBER, CARNEGIE FOUNDATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF TEACHING

AND BEN D. WOOD

DIRECTOR OF COLLEGIATE EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH, COLUMBIA COLLEGE

WITH A FOREWORD BY WALTER A. JESSUP
PRESIDENT OF THE FOUNDATION

BULLETIN, NUMBER TWENTY-NINE



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1938

The authors of the study were clear that they found the results “disappointing.” However, Wood and Learned acknowledged that their assumption that effective teachers should master content knowledge was far from a given within teacher education in the thirties. “It is believed by some,” the report explained, “that a teacher may know too much; that the point of greatest effectiveness in his knowledge equipment will be found somewhat ahead, but not too far ahead, of the particular grade of learner he would help.” In contrast, Wood’s study explained that American schools required “thoroughly educated teachers who know more than their texts and who are free and ready to help a pupil wherever and whenever his problems become acute.”¹⁵

The Carnegie study in Pennsylvania was also revealing as to the state of history and social science education. Test results from high school and college seniors illustrated that student achievement, at least according to the exam, actually deteriorated with additional college courses in history and the social sciences. Amid an array of statistical data, the study saved its harshest criticism for what it described as “Education by Forgetting” which allowed college students of history and the social sciences, many of whom were training to teach, to progress through a curriculum that amounted to a “naïve substitute for educational growth.” As a result, teacher certification based on the number of college courses taken was destined to fail. Answering its own question, “Can Better Teachers Be Had?,” the study contended that only innovative standardized

¹⁵ Learned and Wood, 340, 344.



tests designed to measure content knowledge could overcome inadequate undergraduate education and a patronage system that placed poorly qualified teachers in America's classrooms.¹⁶

Wood's commitment to standardized testing rather than curriculum reform soon took root in teacher education. Wood formed the National Committee on Teacher Examinations in the late 1930s which led to the creation of the National Teacher Examination (NTE) in 1940. In 1944 a committee comprised of representatives of both the American Historical Association (AHA) and the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) issues a report entitled, *American History in Schools and Colleges* which criticized "lax certification standards" and recommended "intelligence tests" and more college courses in history. The report claimed that the "recent inauguration of national examinations" could be useful in helping teachers "check their performance" and address areas of weaknesses. Two years later, in 1946, the NCSS went further in recommending that teacher training and certification utilize "professionally prepared teacher examinations."¹⁷

The proliferation of standardized exams to assess the content knowledge of history teachers occurred just as educational testing came of age in the United States. Building on the evolution of psychology as a discipline and experiences testing American servicemen in World War I and II, the American Council on Education, the College Entrance Examination Board, and the Carnegie Foundation, the author of the original Pennsylvania study, created the Educational Testing Service (ETS) in 1947. Just as important in terms of history education, the rise of educational testing emerged at the same time as the gap between history and the social studies, at the expense of history education, begin to really shape the curricula of American schools. In 1937, the president of the NCSS, which had existed since 1921, lamented that the discipline of history was now considered the "lowly handmaid of the social studies."¹⁸ Three years later, the AHA reported that, for the first time, the majority of the members of the Executive Board of the publication *Social Education* came from NCSS rather than the AHA which represented a "transfer of control of

¹⁶ Learned and Wood, 64-65, 147.

¹⁷ Scott Baker, "Testing Equality: The National Teacher Examination and the NAACP's Legal Campaign to Equalize Teachers' Salaries in the South, 1936-63," *History of Education Quarterly*, 35, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 49-64; Committee on American History in Schools and Colleges, *American History in Schools and Colleges* (New York, 1944) 99, 102; Richard Thursfield and Benjamin S. Joffe, "The Background of Preparation and the Assignment of Teachers of American History" in Richard Thursfield, ed., *The Study and Teaching of American History*, (Washington, D.C., 1946) 400, 406.

¹⁸ Ruth West, "The National Council and the Social Studies Teacher," *Social Education*, 1, no. 2 (February 1937):81-83.



editorial policy.”¹⁹ After decades of what historians Robert Orrill and Linn Shapiro called the “associational activism” of the AHA in secondary history education, the organization and its professional historians begin to lose interest in issues related to K-12 teaching and curriculum at precisely the crucial moment that others increasingly touted standardized testing as the panacea of American education. By 1938 NCSS and the College Board, which worked with ETS to administer the SAT and Advanced Placement exams, provided the two dominant perspectives on the field of social studies while the AHA had, according to Orrill, “scarcely any educational agenda.”²⁰ By World War II, the broad and often poorly defined field of social studies increasingly dominated the teaching of history and the AHA had little influence on a trend toward testing prospective teachers that resembled the Carnegie study on content knowledge more than the College Board’s interest in scholastic aptitude.

The growth in using standardized testing to improve teacher education in the postwar period was not without its critics. James Conant, the president of Harvard University and an early proponent of testing to determine qualified students for college admission, opposed examinations for teacher certification. In *The Education of American Teachers*, written in 1963, Conant criticized such exams as “culturally biased” and unable to measure one’s effectiveness in the classroom.²¹ In another much-discussed book written the same year, James Koerner’s *The Miseducation of American Teachers*, the author lauded the use of exams to promote the profession of teaching. However, Koerner was also adamant that “standardized, machine-scored, multiple-choice examinations” such as the NTE were “wholly unsatisfactory.” Koerner demanded exams both centered on written essays and prepared in large part by “established scholars” in the field.²² Both Conant and Koerner would discover that the direction of change in teacher education was decidedly against them.

Moreover, organizations such as the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), founded in 1954, begin to evaluate the ability of teacher education programs to promote a “candidate’s knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions.” To hold teacher education programs accountable for this standard, NCATE demanded that “all program completers pass the content examinations in states that require examinations for licensure.”

¹⁹ *Annual Report of the American Historical Association, 1940* (Washington, D.C., 1941) 82.

²⁰ Robert Orrill and Linn Shapiro, “From the Bold Beginnings to an Uncertain Future: The Discipline of History and History Education,” *American Historical Review* 110, no. 3 (2005):727-751.

²¹ James B. Conant, *The Education of American Teachers* (New York, 1963) 58.

²² James D. Koerner, *The Miseducation of American Teachers* (Boston, 1963) 252-58.



NCATE also structured its evaluation of programs around the standards of Specialty Professional Organizations or SPAs. Reflecting the relative weakness of the AHA in teacher education and the hegemony of the NCSS in America's schools, NCATE chose NCSS and its ten thematic standards, only one of which directly applied to history, as the organization responsible for establishing the content knowledge of all prospective social studies teachers, including those who teach history. It would not be an exaggeration to claim that NCATE shapes, at least in some way, virtually everything done in contemporary teacher education at over 600 colleges throughout the United States. Yet professional organizations committed to history such as the OAH, the AHA, and the NCHE have little to do with NCATE. While NCATE's expectation that each candidate be able to "demonstrate their knowledge through inquiry, critical analysis, and synthesis of the subject" is admirable, it is far from clear how short multiple-choice exams measure those skills, especially in regard to the discipline of history.²³ Such exams are especially poor for demonstrating historical thinking and, as historian Theodore Rabb stated in 2007, "historians need writing exercises to evaluate proficiency."²⁴ As for their impact on teaching, John Arevalo warned history educators in the late eighties that "Bad tests will almost compel teachers to teach bad history."²⁵

The 1980s and 1990s brought alarming reports as to the failures of American schools and unprecedented efforts to establish standards in terms of student learning and professional teaching. Reports such as *Nation at Risk* (1983) reiterated the goal that teachers should "demonstrate competence in an academic discipline" and "teacher preparation programs should be judged by how well their graduates" succeed in this area.²⁶ In 1986, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) confirmed the fear of many in history education that high school students knew little American history.²⁷ The Bradley Commission on History in the Schools focused on curriculum in 1988 precisely because history educators recognized that it was common

²³ www.ncss.org (accessed December 10, 2008).

²⁴ Theodore Rabb, "Assessments and Standards: The Case of History," *Education Week*, 27, no.13 (November 28, 2007): 28, 36.

²⁵ Arevalo, John et al., "Obstacles Teachers Confront: What Needs to Change," in Gagnon, *Historical Literacy*, 251-267.

²⁶ United States Department of Education, "A Nation Accountable: Twenty Five Years After A Nation at Risk," <http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/accountable/accountable.pdf>

²⁷ National Assessment of Educational Progress, "The History Report Card," <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubinfo.asp?pubid=90497>.



for states to certify history teachers who had taken few if any college courses in history, much less courses that addressed the discipline-specific pedagogy of history education. As recent as the mid 1990s many states relied on social studies teachers, most of whom teach classes in history, with no endorsement in the field. According to the U.S Department of Education, less than 35% of secondary history teachers in 1997 had a college major or minor in history.²⁸

Not surprisingly, the poor performance of American students on standardized exams and the failure of both teacher education programs and school districts to provide qualified teachers resulted in the tremendous growth of teacher testing. By the end of the 1980s, more than a decade before NCLB, almost all states required some sort of standardized testing for teacher candidates. In Illinois, the response was the “Illinois Framework for Restructuring the Recruitment, Preparation, Licensure, and Continuing Professional Development of Teachers” in 1996.²⁹ In establishing standards for teachers, Illinois, similar to many states, stressed a number of positive reforms such as increasing clinical experiences for undergraduates and establishing university-school partnerships. At the same time, however, the state shifted away from the traditional emphasis on coursework that informed the AHA and the Bradley Commission’s approach to reinvigorating history education. Echoing the growing sentiment in the thirties that the problems of American education could be summarized via slogans such as “Credits versus Education” and “Serving Time Versus Learning,” Illinois concluded that the “current course-based requirements for the design of teacher preparation programs should be eliminated.”³⁰ Improving college curriculum and the training of undergraduates as historians, long the purview of history departments, would no longer lie at the heart of reform and accountability in history education. NCLB only solidified the role of testing in 2002 and, with its draconian measures in relation to scores in reading and math, further marginalized the teaching of history. As historian David McCullough testified to a U.S. Senate Committee in 2006, “history is being put on the back burner or taken off the stove altogether in many of the schools, in favor of math and reading.”³¹

²⁸ Ravitch, Diane, “The Educational Background of History Teachers,” in Stearns, 143-155; Sarah D. Brown, “History Teacher Certification Standards in the States,” *The History Teacher*, 39, no. 3 (May 2006): 367-80.

²⁹ Illinois Framework for Restructuring the Recruitment, Preparation, Licensure, and Continuing Professional Development of Teachers (adopted November 21, 1996), www.isbe.org.

³⁰ William S. Learned, “Credits” versus Education (Reprinted from the Proceedings of the Associated Academic Principals of the State of New York, 1933,)1; Goodwin, Watson, *How Good Are Our Colleges?*, Public Affairs Pamphlets, #26 (Public Affairs Committee, Incorporated, 1938) 17.

³¹ Sam Dillon, “Schools Cut Back Subjects to Push Reading and Math: Responding to No Child Left Behind Law, Thousands Narrow the Curriculum,” *New York Times*, March 26, 2006, 1.



The seemingly incongruent response of the NCHE reflected the precarious position of history education in the age of accountability. The organization's position statements criticized "mindless" multiple-choice exams as incapable of assessing historical thinking and analysis while also recommending the inclusion of history to the standardized testing mandated by NCLB to measure Adequately Yearly Progress.³²

Eighty years after the Carnegie Foundation placed standardized exams designed to assess content knowledge in the hands of high school and college students in Pennsylvania, exams such as the *Praxis II*, which replaced the NTE in the nineties, dominated teacher certification in the United States. In 2008, over 35 states required the *Praxis II* exam in social studies and seven other states, including Illinois, use their own similar exam. Although a handful of states required an additional exam, at least 30 relied on the *Social Studies: Content Knowledge* exam which includes only 58 multiple-choice questions on U.S. and World History combined. Fifteen states allow teacher candidates to obtain an endorsement only in history, but three other states require such students to take the general social studies exam rather than the available Praxis exams in history. The reliance on a Praxis exam that is exclusively multiple-choice and contains so little historical content is especially disappointing because ETS offers three additional exams: *Social Studies: Analytical Essays*; *Social Studies: Interpretation and Analysis*; and *Social Studies: Interpretation of Materials* – all of which require students to engage primary sources and provide written interpretation. While the exams are all interdisciplinary, the exams ground questions about contemporary issues in the context of American and world history. Sadly, the exams which recognize the role of history as the core of the social studies and assess historical thinking through primary sources and historical interpretation are required by only six states.³³

The willingness of most states to credential history teachers based on short multiple-choice exams creates a strange system for history education and accountability in American secondary schools and colleges. Each year history departments throughout the nation demand that undergraduate students formulate written interpretations of the past via essays and often lengthy research papers that address historiography and center on the careful analysis of primary sources. Such assignments often occur in innovative college courses that mirror recent trends within the

³² National Council for History Education, "Making Sure History is Not Left Behind," and "Statement on Assessment in History Education," December 21, 2006, http://www.nche.net/what_we_do/position_statements.html.

³³ www.ets.org and websites for individual state boards of education. The six states are Arizona, Arkansas, Louisiana, New Hampshire, Oregon, and Vermont.



discipline of history. In this sense, historians tie meaningful instruction, readings, and assessments to issues such as those reflected in recent publications from professional organizations such as the AHA and the OAH. Examples include “Women and Gender in Global Perspective;” “Essays on Global and Comparative History;” “The New American History;” “Historical Perspectives on Technology, Society, and Culture,” “Teaching Diversity,” and *America on the World Stage: A Global Approach to U.S. History*. Ideally, any testing associated with history education should, at least indirectly, reflect these developments.³⁴

The inability of teacher certification exams to reflect the dynamic nature of the discipline underscores the reactionary quality of standardized exams in history education. The growth of exams in the twenties and again later in the twentieth century followed periods of rapid social change in which historians - ranging from Charles Beard and the Progressive historians early in the century to the so-called New Left historians in the sixties - abandoned older models of historiography. Advocates of educational testing such as Wood and the architects of *No Child Left Behind* were attracted to educational exams because they promised a reassuring sense of rational order and accountability within a rapidly changing American society. However, it was precisely these dramatic changes related to a modern, pluralistic America that led historians to abandon the narrow methodology and grand narratives necessary for encapsulating American and world history in brief standardized exams. The burgeoning commitment to using standardized testing in recent decades arose soon after the discipline increasingly rejected older assumptions of American exceptionalism and a singular American experience. Ironically, just as most historians dismissed the comfort of older narratives as hopelessly reductionist, educators became increasingly committed to holding history teachers and students accountable for a small number of particular historical facts. In short, the exams designed to hold history education programs accountable for content knowledge no longer reflect the teaching and learning of history in higher education.³⁵

Furthermore, the rigor of exams to assess the content knowledge of college-educated history teachers and their students vary tremendously. In American high schools the College Board’s Advanced Placement exams in history, taken by hundreds of thousands of high school students

³⁴ Publications 2009, American Historical Association, <http://www.historians.org/pubshop/>; Organization of American Historians, Gary Reichard and Ted Dickson, eds., *America on the World Stage: A Global Approach to U.S. History* (Urbana, Ill. 2008).

³⁵ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, 1988) 420; Jonathan Rees, “A Crisis over Consensus: Standardized Testing in American History and Student Learning,” *Radical Pedagogy* 5, no. 2 (2003) http://radicalpedagogy.icaap.org/content/issue5_2/03_rees.html.



each spring, include seventy to eighty multiple-choice questions in either U.S. history, European history, or World history. A high school student taking all three exams would face 230 multiple-choice questions. More importantly, the objective sections of the rigorous A.P. exams compliment numerous written essays involving primary source documents and requiring substantial historical analysis and interpretation.³⁶

In contrast, prospective teachers of history, including those instructors who will eventually teach courses in A.P. history and prepare students for college, answer a relatively small number of multiple-choice questions on historical issues and can become “highly qualified” in history without earning a degree in the subject. As if to highlight the dubious value of the required *Social Science: History* exam in Illinois, the state passing rate, long the product of a mysterious process unknown even to those who work in history education, curiously rose from 69% in 2004 to 84% in 2008. At Illinois State University, one of the largest history education programs in the nation where students routinely graduate with a grade point average of approximately 3.0, the passing rate increased from 62% to 90% in four years without any substantial effort to prepare students for the exam. The easiest solution to breaking the long tradition of relying on such poor assessment tools is to tie teacher certification in history to existing Advanced Placement exams. Such exams cost more to administer but would ensure that future history teachers are capable of promoting the sources, methodology, analysis, and compelling debates that fuel the discipline.³⁷

Eighty years after educational researchers first began to link standardized tests and historical content knowledge such exams are ubiquitous in teacher education. Mandated for professional certification, short multiple-choice exams leave little room for historiography, historical thinking, a diversity of experiences and perspectives, and the detective work that encourages students and teachers to enjoy history. They also reflect an educational climate that, in addition to often demanding less of history teachers than their students, leaves advocates of history education wondering how to place the discipline, rather than accountability and accreditation, at the center of preparing history teachers.

³⁶ www.collegeboard.com.

³⁷ “Clinical Experiences and Certification Processes: Annual Report 2007-2008,” Illinois State University, 56-64. For examples of important works on historical thinking and teaching, see Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (2001) and Frederick Drake and Lynn Nelson, *Engagement in Teaching History: Theory and Practice for Middle and Secondary Teachers* (2nd edition, 2008).