HISTORY ADMISSIONS ASSESSMENT

CONTENT SPECIFICATION

2017

Overview

The purpose of the History Admissions Assessment is to determine a candidate's potential to achieve in an academically demanding undergraduate degree course. The assessment is designed to be challenging, in order to differentiate effectively between able applicants, including those who may have achieved the highest possible grades in school examinations.

The assessment will take two hours and consists of two sections:

Section 1

Section 1 is an assessment of candidates' reading skills, including their ability to read critically, understand main ideas in texts, analyse detail and grasp implicit meaning.

Section 1 is in multiple-choice format. 1 hour is allowed for this section of the assessment.

Section 2

Section 2 requires a written response from candidates, and asks them to compare and contrast two passages from historical texts. This section is designed to assess candidates' ability to read closely and deploy arguments effectively.

1 hour is allowed for this section of the assessment.

Dictionaries may **not** be used in any part of this assessment.

Section 1

Section 1 of the History Admissions Assessment assesses the ability to understand and draw meaning from texts in a multiple-choice format. This section of the assessment is not subject-specific, and texts included will be on a variety of topics and may be drawn from a range of sources.

All academic subjects require the ability to critically read a variety of sometimes challenging texts for meaning. Specifically, the tasks in Section 1 focus on identifying the way in which the texts are structured, the main ideas being presented, and the way in which these are supported and developed.

Section 1 consists of four tasks, based around text excerpts. Each task will have a set of multiple-choice questions with four options. Questions will not require specialist knowledge or any information beyond what is contained within the texts.

There is a specimen question for Section 1 in the Appendix of this document.

Content

Each task will use recently written texts, from authentic sources, in English. Sources may include works of non-fiction (at a relatively high level conceptually and linguistically but which do not assume specialist subject knowledge), newspapers, general interest magazines, book reviews, abstracts written for research papers or journal articles, and professional websites. Texts will not depend on the understanding of specific aspects of British culture.

Questions will require candidates to:

- look at the main ideas and focus of a text;

- analyse the detail and distinguish opinions and attitudes presented in the text;

- determine the writer's purpose in writing the text, including consideration of intended audience;

- extract implications and implicitly stated elements of the text;

- draw comparisons and contrasts within a text or between different texts.

For all tasks, the emphasis is on identification of opinion, attitude, purpose and inferred meaning rather than the retrieval of directly stated factual details. Questions may also focus on elements of text organisation which support meaning, such as the use of exemplification and comparison.

Format

Section 1 consists of four tasks. **Candidates will be required to answer all questions in all of the tasks.** Each task will consist of one or more text excerpts and a set of four-option multiple-choice questions. There will be no overlap between tasks. Answers to questions will not depend on other questions.

Task 1: Understanding Short Texts

Questions in this task are on two short abstracts or reviews on a common topic. Texts will be no more than 200 words each. The task assesses a candidate's ability to identify, compare and contrast features of two different texts. The candidate's understanding of the two texts is tested through discrete questions aiming to cover a wide range of focuses with the emphasis on identification of opinion, attitude, purpose and inferred meaning rather than the retrieval of directly stated factual details. Questions may also focus on elements of text organisation which support meaning, such as the use of exemplification, comparison and reference.

Task 2: Multiple-Matching

Questions in this task are on four short extracts, either from four different writers on the same theme or four extracts from the same source. Extracts will be no more than 200 words each. This task requires candidates to locate a text where a particular idea is expressed, discounting ideas in other texts which may appear similar but do not reflect the whole of the question accurately. Each question requires the candidate to scan the four texts to locate the area of text which appears to contain the answer, and then to read this carefully to check that it is the correct answer.

Task 3: Understanding Extended Text

Questions in this task are on one extended text (of no more than 1000 words). The task assesses the understanding of a longer stretch of academic text which may include argument, supported claims, and reference to previous work and ideas in a particular field.

Task 4: Understanding Extended Text

Like Task 3, Task 4 tests the understanding of a longer stretch of academic text (in this case, of up to 1200 words) which may include argument, supported claims, and reference to previous work and ideas in a particular field.

Scoring

All questions are worth 1 mark. Marks are not deducted for incorrect answers, so candidates are advised to answer all questions.

Section 2

Section 2 of the History Admissions Assessment involves the comparison of two passages of text on historical themes, which may be either primary or secondary sources and will involve reading text of around 1000 words. Candidates will have 1 hour to complete this element of the task and it is anticipated that they might wish to spend around a quarter of their time reading and planning, and the remainder of the time writing.

The task is designed to test comprehension and the ability to read closely and deploy arguments effectively. It is designed to test the skills that historians will need to use continuously throughout their undergraduate studies.

Section 2 assesses candidates' ability to:

- think analytically;
- produce a coherent argument;
- select and use evidence appropriately;
- address the question directly and clearly;
- make connections between sources and ideas;
- understand historical mentalities and comprehend difference;
- handle concepts precisely;
- write with clarity and precision under time pressure.

Not all answers will demonstrate these qualities equally but the best answers will show signs of all, or nearly all, of them.

APPENDIX: SPECIMEN QUESTIONS

Section 1

Task 1

Read the two abstracts below, which give summaries of two academic articles relating to cities and urban development. For questions 1 – 6, choose the answer (A, B, C or D) which you think fits best according to the texts.

ABSTRACT ONE

Retrofitting cities: Local governance in Sydney, Australia
Robyn Dowling, Pauline McGuirk, Harriet Bulkeley
Transforming cities to a lower carbon future is a key challenge of contemporary urban governance. Retrofitting the city – or modifying existing urban infrastructures, buildings and daily life to suit different energy sources and expectations of energy consumption – is essential to this transformation. In urban studies, little focus has been applied to the shape and character of urban governance frameworks and mechanisms required to successfully retrofit cities. In this paper we address this lacuna by exploring the logics, practices and dynamics of retrofitting governance in the Australian city. Using a governmentality perspective, the paper identifies the involvements of different scales of government in retrofitting policies and mechanisms and connections between them. Based on our survey of carbon reduction initiatives involving government, business and community actors across Australia's cities, we outline the types of retrofitting solutions being proposed and enacted. Focussing on initiatives from Sydney, Australia's largest city, the paper documents four key techniques through which retrofitting is being governed – self-governing, holistic, facilitative and educative. The findings indicate that governance gaps remain in attending to the daily life of technologies and the materiality of daily life.

ABSTRACT TWO

Critical research on eco-cities? A walk through the Sino-Singapore Tianjin Eco-City, China
Federico Caprotti
This article uses the narrative tool of a walk through Tianjin Eco-City, China, as an entry point in raising and discussing key questions in contemporary eco-city research. Eco-city projects are becoming increasingly prevalent in policy and political-economic discourses in a variety of locations as new urban spaces where blueprints for low carbon economies can be trialled. In light of this, the article highlights the necessity of, firstly, considering scale when analyzing eco-city 'futures'. Secondly, the article argues for the need to interrogate eco-cities' definitions, as well as their evaluation, performance and monitoring frameworks, as this will aid in critical analyses of the marketing and presentation of actually built eco-city projects. Thirdly, the question of internal social resilience needs to be assessed: this is of crucial importance in light of the exclusive, gated nature of several flagship eco-city projects under construction at present. Lastly, the article argues that research on eco-city projects needs to consider not only high-tech, new urban environments, but also the low-paid workers who form what the article calls the 'new urban poor', forming large, often transient populations on the edges of flagship 'sustainable' urban projects worldwide.

1   According to Abstract One, what is the main aim of the article on retrofitting cities?

     A   to defend the idea of retrofitting

     B   to point out weaknesses in retrofitting technology

     C   to describe the technology required for retrofitting

     D   to look at methods of achieving retrofitting

2   Which word from Abstract One describes the theoretical framework used by the writers in their analysis of retrofitting in Sydney?

     A   'lacuna'

     B   'governmentality'

     C   'holistic'

     D   'materiality'

3   In Abstract One, the writers claim that one feature of their research is that

     A   they have engaged with an area representing a weakness in the field.

     B   they have proposed a way of integrating key techniques.

     C   they have identified potentially divisive underlying attitudes.

     D   they have employed a controversial methodology.

4   In Abstract Two, the writer says that eco-city projects are important because

     A   they show that low carbon economies are sustainable.

     B   they provide an opportunity for testing economic models.

     C   they offer new opportunities for disadvantaged groups.

     D   they encourage political involvement in environmental issues.

5 In Abstract Two, 'exclusive, gated nature' contrasts with

    A 'internal social resilience'.

    B 'new urban environments'.

    C 'new urban poor'.

    D 'projects under construction'.

6 Which abstract refers to the physical experience of a particular city being used as a stylistic device?

    A neither abstract

    B both abstracts

    C Abstract One only

    D Abstract Two only

Key

1 D **2** B **3** A **4** B **5** C **6** D

Section 2

Please read passages I and II below and write your answer to the task **on the separate answer sheet provided**. You have 1 hour to complete the task and should spend up to 15 minutes reading the passages and planning your response.

Compare and contrast the characterisations of Athenian democracy offered in these two passages.

 I

Now, in discussing the Athenian constitution, I cannot commend their present method of running the state, because in choosing it they preferred that the masses should do better than the respectable citizens; this, then, is my reason for not commending it. Since, however, they have made this choice, I will demonstrate how well they preserve their constitution and handle the other affairs for which the rest of the Greeks criticise them.

My first point is that it is right that the poor and ordinary people there should have more power than the noble and the rich, because it is the ordinary people who man the fleet and bring the city her power; they provide the helmsmen, the boatswains, the junior officers, the look-outs, and the shipwrights; it is these people who make the city powerful much more than the heavy-armed infantry and the noble and respectable classes. This being so, it seems just that all should share in public office by lot and by election, and that any citizen who wishes should be able to speak in the Assembly…

Again, some people are surprised at the fact that in all fields they give more power to the masses, the poor and the common people than they do to the respectable elements of society, but it will become clear that they preserve the democracy by doing precisely this. When the poor, the ordinary people and the lower classes flourish and increase in numbers, then the power of the democracy will be increased; if, however, the rich and the respectable flourish, the democrats increase the strength of their opponents. Throughout the world the aristocracy are opposed to democracy, for they are naturally least liable to loss of self-control and injustice and most meticulous in their regard for what is respectable, whereas the masses display extreme ignorance, indiscipline and wickedness, for poverty gives them a tendency towards the ignoble, and in some cases lack of money leads to their being uneducated and ignorant…

The common people do not wish to be deprived of their rights in an admirably governed city, but to be free and to rule the city; they are not disturbed by inferior laws, for the common people get their strength and freedom from what you define as inferior laws. If you are looking for an admirable code of laws, first you will find that the ablest draw them up in their own interest; secondly, the respectable will punish the masses, and will plan the city's affairs and will not allow men who are mad to take part in planning or discussion or even sit in the Assembly. As a result of this excellent system the common people would very soon lose all of their political rights…

I do not blame the common people for their democracy, for anyone is to be pardoned for looking after his own interests; but a man who is not of the common people and chooses to live in a city that is ruled by a democracy rather than an oligarchy is preparing to do wrong, and realises that it is easier to get away with being wicked under a democracy than under an oligarchy.

The Constitution of the Athenians **(anonymous pamphlet, c. 425 B.C.)**

II

In the same winter [431–430 B.C.] the Athenians, following their annual custom, gave a public funeral for those who had been the first to die in the war…Pericles…was chosen to make the speech. When the moment arrived…he spoke as follows:

"What I want to do is…to discuss the spirit in which we faced our trials and also our constitution and the way of life which has made us great. After that I shall speak in praise of the dead, believing that this kind of speech is not inappropriate to the present occasion, and that this whole gathering, of citizens and foreigners, may listen to it with advantage.

Let me say that our system of government does not copy the institutions of our neighbours. It is more the case of our being a model to others, than of our imitating anyone else. Our constitution is called a democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of the whole people. When it is a question of settling private disputes, everyone is equal before the law; when it is a question of putting one person before another in positions of public responsibility, what counts is not membership of a particular class but the actual ability which the man possesses. No one, as long as he has it in him to be of service to the state, is kept in political obscurity because of poverty…

We are free and tolerant in our private lives; but in public we keep to the law. This is because it commands our deep respect. We give our obedience to those whom we put in positions of authority, and we obey the laws themselves, especially those which are for the protection of the oppressed, and those unwritten laws which it is an acknowledged shame to break…

We regard wealth as something to be properly used, rather than as something to boast about. As for poverty, no one need be ashamed to admit it: the real shame is in not taking practical measures to escape from it. Here each individual is interested not only in his own affairs but in the affairs of the state as well: even those who are mostly occupied with their own business are extremely well-informed on general politics – this is a peculiarity of ours: we do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man that minds his own business; we say that he has no business here at all…

Taking everything together then, I declare that our city is an education to Greece, and I declare that in my opinion each single one of our citizens, in all the manifold aspects of life, is able to show himself the rightful lord and owner of his own person, and to do this, moreover, with exceptional grace and exceptional versatility. And to show that this is no empty boasting for the present occasion, but real tangible fact, you have only to consider the power which our city possesses and which has been won by those very qualities which I have mentioned…"

Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (c. 400 B.C.)

Cambridge Assessment
Admissions Testing