1) Statement of the learning goals for the assessment that you are reviewing:

Students completing the Ph.D. in History must demonstrate an understanding of the ethical principles that govern our field and are expected to be conversant with the ethical issues commonly encountered in the following areas:

1) Research. Students conducting research with human subjects should be conversant with the guidelines for human subject clearance and must receive approval from an Institutional Review Board. In accordance with CUNY policy, all graduate students admitted after Fall 2012 must complete training in the Responsible Conduct of Research and submit the Human Subjects Clearance form.

2) Publication. Students should be able to make responsible use of evidence in developing arguments, and properly to acknowledge sources that they cite in their work. The two semester Seminar and Literature courses, required of all first-year students, provides a foundation in conventions of citation and fair use. Guidance in making responsible use of the work of others is also provided by seminar instructors, faculty members, and dissertation supervisors.

2) A description of what data or other information you are drawing on:

All PhD Program in History faculty and students were surveyed via email in April 2016.

The faculty were asked to “write a brief summary of how they advanced professional development and ethics through coursework and mentorship”. Because only three faculty members replied, the program asked the curricular committee to consider these questions in Fall 2017.

The Curricular Committee consisted of five faculty members and three students. Based upon its review of data and its members’ own specific experiences and knowledge of Program initiatives, both current and former, the Committee took stock of how the Program customarily incorporates professional ethics into its curriculum and events, analyzed the extent and effectiveness of the Program’s composite training in ethics, and proposed changes that would meaningfully improve and complement what the Program already does.

Twenty one students replied. They were asked the following three questions:

1) What kind of formal professional ethics training have you received?
Five students reported some training in their GC History classes:
“There was a required ethics training for first-year students at the beginning of the program. It covered plagiarism, scholarship fraud, etc., and was pretty well done and memorable.”
“Formal mini-unit on honest research practices in Research Seminar 1 first year. I would also consider some of the coursework I've elected to do in public history and pedagogy to fall into the category of ethics training, as responsible research is not our only professional ethical obligation.”

Seven students indicated that their only ethical training came from the IRB’s CITI training or the GC’s RCR workshops:
“I have done the online CITI training and gone through the IRB process (writing an entire proposal, because the GC IRB contact said I had to for an oral history. Within an hour of submitting it to Baruch, where I am to submit because that is where my advisor is, I was called by someone in the Baruch IRB office who apologized for me having done the entire proposal for oral history, saying it was unnecessary for oral history. Ugh.).”

Three said they received training elsewhere: “As part of my WAC fellowship, I received monthly seminar training in writing and language instruction. As a TA at Hunter College for two years, I received pedagogical instruction from three different faculty members there, as well as taking a one credit course that the GC offered.” “I did take a course in professional ethics in law school years back that was very thorough.

Seven students replied that they had received none: “I have received no formal ethics training since beginning my graduate degree.”

2) Have you participated in IRB and RCR (Responsible Conduct of Research) training? Did you find it useful?
Four said they had not participated:
“I have not attended any ethics training nor have I participated in IRB or RCR training. I would not find either helpful because my research does not involve human subjects.”
“I submitted a paragraph-length proposal to the IRB earlier this semester, but was told that I should resubmit when I have my proposal developed in full. Apart from that, I haven't received any IRB or RCR training.”

Seventeen said they had, but most did not find it useful:
“I recall a mandatory session that was an hour or two long and took place in Proshanksky Auditorium. It had to do with professional ethics but was mostly geared toward people in fields where their research was likely to have either commercial or governmental/military application, mainly research that may be profitable.”
“However does "ethics training" include the corporate "courses" that we are required to take online. These purport to educate us about preventing workplace violence and the like, but are incredibly condescending and useless. I guess the function of these is to reduce college liability?”
“Yes, I have participated in RCR training and found it only somewhat useful as it seemed mainly oriented towards research ethics in hard science fields or those involving live human subjects.
While some of my peers do research involving still-living historical actors, mine does not so much of the RCR training was of limited applicability to my scholarship."
“The only training was through CITI online course. I found it interesting, and could appreciate it. But the language was not applicable to our discipline at all. It wasn't especially helpful for me.”
“I have participated in IRB/RCR. Though interesting, it wasn't entirely applicable to historical research methods and more useful for group research. It was interesting to gain insight into the methodology of other disciplines.”
“Yes, in the mandatory lecture in my first year, but it was not as relevant for me as I do not use human or animal subjects.”
“Only professional ethics training I've had is the IRB training. As much as I hate to say, it would be better to do it in person with give and take about real problems based on particular discipline. No point in me dealing with drug trials, yet there are clearly social science specific issues.”
“Yes and yes, although it was more focus on ethic dilemmas for student of other areas (like biology, engineering, social sciences etc.) than humanities.”
“Seemed far more about science than about history.”
“It'd be great for the history department to join with other history departments and history organizations in issuing a statement that oral history should not require IRB approval. It's important to do the ethics big, and even submitting the brief query to IRB makes sense for oral history, I suppose.”

A few did:
“Yes I have participated (in RCR) and I did find it useful in terms of providing references if I have further questions.”
“I have find it useful - it is a requirement in the Lehman WAC program to take IRB/RCR training. While there were elements that were useful, most of it was geared towards the hard and more lab-oriented social sciences. If I was a 20th century historian working with oral sources, that might be different.”

3) Do you feel that ethics training is embedded in GC coursework?
Seven said yes:
“I do think that professional ethics have been embedded, if informally, into my coursework, such that I feel I have a pretty good sense of the standards in my discipline.”
“Generally, yes. Every course - the lit survey vs. a specialized concentration, for example - are going to focus on different components of "ethics" (citation and plagiarism, respectful exchange of ideas etc.) but the stakes are different since historians prior to 1945 don’t have human subjects.”
“This is the hardest question to answer. I think that it is the manner in which courses are conducted more than the content, per se, that conveys principles of ethical conduct in the history profession. I do think this has taken place in at least some courses I have taken at the GC.”
“Yes, I think there is a constant remanding of ethical problems within and outside coursework.”
“Issues of ethics are in the coursework, but rarely addressed explicitly as such. Maybe makes sense to include ethics as a part of the first year literature class? Or maybe it would make more
sense in the first year research class, since ethics for us comes up in the context of research and writing.”

**Thirteen said no – but only some of them want that to change:**

“I believe they discussed ethics during our orientation, and I do not believe we need additional required training for it.”

“I don’t think of ethics training as embedded in my coursework. There were certainly points in my coursework at which my understanding of professional ethics was enhanced, but this took place indirectly. I think it would detract considerably from the quality of coursework if professors were in some way required to include specific professional ethics training in their courses, however.”

“No. Not at all. Well, first semester one professor brought in a colleague from Hunter I think who told a horror story of receiving a cease and desist letter pending IRB approval for asking a question of an archivist and beginning research on a subject who had passed away. The takeaway was that the IRB process is arbitrary, not applicable to history, and yet has a lot of power over our research: be very afraid.”

“Again, the professional ethics training didn’t apply so much to historical methods or literary criticism, and short of the small chance I ever work with human subjects, doesn’t really apply to the work I do. In some theoretical readings on medical anthropology with Dagmar Herzog, we’ve actively discussed ethnographic methods however.”

“Learning about ethics is completely organic to the humanities field, so any study of philosophy, history, political science, anthropology, sociology, etc, etc. will inevitably include significant learning about ethics. Ethics training - which I suspect is envisioned here as a series of powerpoint slides or a discrete lecture on a specific topic - should not be in a classroom.”

“Our professors hear and cultivate the different opinions and perspectives of students in their coursework. Knowledge and reminders of plagiarism are a given, and our work in archives is also overseen by our advisers.”

“I do not think it should be embedded in GC coursework ... the courses are too varied to put that kind of stuff into each course. I think professors who have conducted research with human subjects (oral histories, etc.) should share their experiences organically with students as classroom conversation turns to that subject. “

“Not in history, but generally I don’t think our methods (archival research, eg) flirts with unethical behavior.”

**3) Your findings. Is the assessment (and preparation for it) effective?**

The student responses indicate that a more coordinated effort needs to be undertaken. Guidance from the Provost’s Office about changes to the IRB process for Humanities students has been gratefully received. While there are no reported problematic behaviors due to a lack of systematic ethics training, there also seems to be little understanding of what this means for History.

The Curricular Committee found:
The Ph.D. Program in History requires of all first-year students curricular sequences that transmit the professional norms and conventions governing the ethical use of sources and evidence in the historical profession—namely, the two-semester Research Seminar and Historical Literature courses. Among other things, these courses specifically provide students with a foundation in the conventions of citation and fair use. These courses further provide guidance in making responsible, or principled, use of the work of others, as well as of archives and archival evidence. To this latter end, most faculty members routinely seek to impart the fundamental norms and conventions governing historical research and writing by covering topics such as, ethical research practices, the making of research verifiable and therefore credible through systematic citation, the technique of citation and the use of evidence, the drawing (of reasonable) conclusions from evidence, and, last but not least, the bright and fine lines of plagiarism and, conversely, fabrication. The outcome of such training, as one faculty member has put it, should be the cultivation of “an ethical perspective that is sensitive to the misuse of others’ work or ideas, evidence, and argument, as well as the gratuitous abuse of historical facts, figures, and individuals.” In these courses, some faculty members additionally address the techniques and norms governing research with human subjects, such as ethical oral history techniques and use of its evidence, privacy rights, and ethical use of Freedom of Information access.

Beyond the norms governing research and publication, within the context of the first-year Research Seminar some faculty members further provide guidance regarding the professional obligations and ethical duties of teaching, and cover topics such as, the obligations for reporting, the ethical importance of making of requirements explicit and equitable, ethical grading policies, and the ethical handling of student plagiarism and cheating on exams.

What is more, the Program regularly offers optional professional development workshops on a number of real-world situations, where ethical questions inevitably arise such as, conference participation, job interviews, etc.

4) Proposed changes, if any, to the assessment, the learning goals for it, the curriculum/preparation leading up to it.

The Curricular Committee found:
Although the required first-year courses routinely present ethical norms and practices that guide historical research and writing, the Curricular Committee recommends that the Program improve consistency in the topics it routinely teach and information it offer students, both in the first year and beyond, so that the entire student body in History is uniformly well-equipped to afront and resolve the ethical questions raised by their own research and writing, first as students and later as CUNY-graduates and professionals. To standardize the training in professional ethics offered across the Program’s writing courses, the Curricular Committee recommends the inclusion on the syllabi of all first-year and advanced research seminars:

1) a brief statement on the ethics of proper representation and citation of all sources, as well as a review of conventional citation practices in History;
2) mention of the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity, regulating cheating and plagiarism, and a link thereto;
3) mention of CUNY’s Policy on Training in the Responsible Conduct of Research, and a link thereto, as well as CITI training requirements and opportunities;
4) and mention of the CUNY policy on research with human subjects, and a link to CUNY’s manual on HRPP (Human Subjects Research Protection Program) Policies and Procedures, and reference to its guidelines regarding “researcher responsibilities,” and the many principles and procedures potentially regarding compliance therewith, especially as outlined in 4.0 and following, and 7.0 and following.

To meaningfully broaden the Program’s training in professional ethics, the Committee further recommends that the Program find ways to address standards for model professional comportment and behavior, from the classroom to conferences and meetings. One way to do so could be to convey within the setting of the required first-year courses the notion that professional ethics also comprise holding oneself to behavioral standards, both in and beyond the classroom, that are ideally suited to sustaining the pillars of humanistic knowledge. Be it through words or in writing, the Committee strongly suggests that the instructors of the first-year courses be encouraged to sensitize students to not only the merits but also real advantages to be gained from modes of comportment and forms of behavior that promote professional dialogue, collaboration, and, therewith, the advancement of humanistic forms of knowledge--such as, the practice of listening to and seriously engaging the work of one’s peers, the art of offering constructive criticism and feedback, and other forms of intellectual solidarity and collaboration, from the formation of and participation in research support groups to the coordination of student conferences and professional conference panels.

To more effectively prepare students for the many ethical obligations, and challenges, of real world teaching, the Committee strongly recommends that the existing seminar could profitably expand its scope to include some guidance on particularly thorny ethical issues that can easily vex young, inexperienced teachers such as, the crafting of a professional persona that both projects a sense of authority while honoring ethical norms of professional comportment in the classroom, the responsible and ethical handling of cases of harassment, the responsible and ethical handling of cases of students with exceptionally difficult problems, from learning disabilities to mental illness, etc. In sum, the Committee suggests that the seminar should inform students not only of their many ethical obligations but also rights as teachers in the CUNY system, and that it should reinforce the value of behavioral standards and principles which sustain the profession’s larger intellectual community.

5) The next steps that will be taken. (There should be a follow-up on these in the report for the next cycle.)

The Executive Officer will share these recommendations with all faculty. An update will be provided in the next assessment cycle.