

Report of the External Review Committee of the Department of History
The Ohio State University
April 24, 2016

The members of the external review committee would like, first, to express our thanks to Ohio State's various Vice Provosts and Deans with whom we met and to Department Chair Nate Rosenstein and the faculty, students, and staff of the Department of History for welcoming us so warmly and for sharing their views with us openly and generously. We learned a great deal about this historic and accomplished department during our short visit to the Columbus campus; we also realize that there is much about the Department, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the University that we do not fully comprehend. Nonetheless, we offer the following report in the hope that it will assist the University and the History Department in building on strengths that are palpable.

Department Strengths

The Ohio State History Department embodies two important characteristics: foundational strength and resilience. Its strengths are multiple. The cumulative recent publication record of department members and of the profile of that scholarly work reflects well on the University. So, too, does the appearance of faculty names among recipients of major scholarly awards. Tied to that is a professionalism that supervisory faculty clearly pass on to their graduate students. Ohio State History PhD's have been doing quite well in a difficult job market, something that attests to the high regard members of other institutions have for OSU throughout a sizeable hinterland, the Department's institutionalization of mentoring, training, and preparation of graduate students for future careers, and in the receptivity of these students to the standards of scholarship and teaching (perhaps in the latter case to a fault) that their advisors and peers stress. It is clear, too, that collectively the professoriate cares about their undergraduates; the department's relatively recent undergraduate program reorganization embodies a series of laudable attempts to adjust to a rapidly changing undergraduate environment.

Self-studies of Academic departments often give considerable space to the perceived difficulties of the moment. The 2015 OSU History report is typical in this regard. There are deep concerns about large declines in History enrolment, a recognition of the difficulty of shaping a department during years of attrition and exogenous hiring demands, a stated determination to address diversity issues in all their complexity, and widely shared sense of being underappreciated by the overarching University administration. In the face of this, the Department has demonstrated great resilience. That resilience is strongly reflected in the creative measures the Department has taken to adjust to the current academic environment.

The most striking History innovation is the Constellations initiative, which is so important because it cuts across the various issues of faculty attrition, allocation of faculty positions, and department balancing, substantially impacts both graduate and undergraduate programs, and offers a means of beginning to address the unenviable but essential task of reconciling traditional field demarcations and attendant strengths with diversity concerns, new directions in historical writing and cross-disciplinary thinking. Much of the Constellations program is inchoate but the

fact that the Department has conceived of it and begun to flesh it out is attribute to the OSU historians. Other examples of the Department's success in pouring the foundations for increased scholarly engagement and profile are impressive in their presence and more so in their potential for departmental community building, enhancing scholarship and educational literacy in the digital world, and in sharing historical knowledge in useful and appealing ways for the general public under a prominent OSU banner. This is a department that has an entrepreneurial gene, evident in the CHR, the *Origins* project, the activities of the Goldberg Center and in accompanying fund-raising aspirations. This is a rare and valuable trait in a core Humanities department.

The initiative that the aforementioned undertakings bespeak appears in other areas as well. Not to be overlooked is the very thorough and professional study "Strategies and Best Practices for Increasing Enrollment in the Department of History" and the activities of the Department's Graduate Placement Officer. Overall we met a department of undergraduates, graduate students, staff, junior faculty and associate professors that evinced the kind of affability and mutual respect essential to fulfilling the multifaceted aspirations of such a large and important institution as Ohio State. Circumstances that support such feelings range from what many see as significant, if not entirely sufficient support for research, equitable teaching arrangements among faculty and space in which to undertake initiatives within what they simultaneously perceive to be an overly hierarchical university administration. Since the last review eight years ago department leadership clearly put much effort into creating a greater sense of inclusion among faculty, including those at satellite campuses. This we expect will be very helpful as faculty face some of the knotty problems of department reinvention, defense of the discipline, and a number of related intra-department negotiations. There appear to be sufficient individuals at the full professor rank who, in conjunction with the large majority of the Department, will be of extraordinary help to the foresighted and adept department leadership that History now needs.

Opportunities

The History department plays an invaluable role at OSU and is central to its mission of a liberal arts education, even (or especially) for those students focused on STEM disciplines. In order to maintain this position over the long-term, we believe it is important to address various concerns about matters that might make sustained excellence at a time of shrinking resources increasingly difficult. Possible responses to these concerns will be incorporated in our recommendations.

The department is clearly a very congenial place to work and has made consistent efforts to react to administration hiring initiatives proactively. But we did not develop a clear sense of its future trajectory. The self-study focused on a wide variety of issues, including impediments to hiring. But in that report we did not see evidence of how the department would prioritize positions in a time of scarcity. If the department were not to see growth (or might even shrink), how would it sustain excellence without simply replacing every faculty member who left or retired? How might it envision particular areas of strength? Are there fields in which it could afford to keep only one faculty member? Are there areas that are currently underdeveloped but that would be fruitful to pursue? How indeed should fields and areas be conceived in such a way that they are coordinated for the purposes of a graduate program as well as to maintain clusters of strength? OSU remains top-ranked in some fields and no longer in others, which have been hurt badly by

departures and scarce resources. We felt that the department needed to have an honest if difficult discussion about strategic priorities, even though it is always a challenge for any department to pick and choose among fields in which many people may well have deep investments. This kind of discussion—which all departments need to have on a regular basis—is, in our view, the only way to respond as proactively as possible to shrinking resources, to remain responsible to graduate students by training them for jobs that are available, and to address the question of diversity. It is understandable that there is currently low morale given the perception of restrained (or nonexistent) autonomy in faculty hiring, but it was not clear to us that the department had put forward a clear hiring plan that reflected on substantive questions about how to move forward. We urge the department to begin a series of discussions about strategic hiring. It may be possible to lift morale and ensure a better reception by the administration were the department to map out a vision of its future rather than reacting to opportunities as they arise.

The department is insufficiently diverse, and has itself pointed out problems in this area. It is unfortunate that the department's efforts to hire in ways that would have begun to address this problem have met with College inconsistency and we hope the administration will be more receptive in the future. We do not believe that diversity hires should be conceived as “add ons” by the department or the administration, and every effort to diversify the faculty could be incorporated into a strategic plan by hiring in areas where there are large numbers of underrepresented minorities. Universities often have varying definitions of diversity, but it is clear that faculty of color are underrepresented at every rank, which also makes it difficult to attract both graduate and undergraduate students of color to History. The department has achieved some gender balance but will want to redistribute service positions so that the burden does not fall so heavily on female associate professors (and on all faculty of color). Finally, it is also important that the department and administration consider hiring faculty members of color at the senior level so that women and minorities more quickly occupy positions in which they will have a hand in shaping the department. We understand that this takes time and focused prioritization but it is an important strategy if a university and department is serious about diversifying its faculty and student body most effectively.

We noticed what appeared to be fractured lines of communication between the department and the higher administration. On several issues, including the process of admitting graduate students and faculty hiring, we heard very different versions from faculty and administrators of what should be self-evident procedures. We do not know if this is a structural problem related to the multilayered administrative apparatus (the Dean of Arts and Sciences possesses power over academic units and mediates between them and the provost's office). This is a normal structure in most places, but the distance between administrative units seems more than mere institutional size at such a large public university might dictate.. Whatever the causes, we did have a clear sense that the administration and faculty were speaking past one another. It is very important that the administration make every effort to clarify new policies and initiatives, and provide forums within which faculty can discuss them. At a time of administrative turnover, communication is especially important, and faculty leadership also needs to ensure that the department is fully aware of all impending developments that impact the life of the faculty. Again, we do not know why communication appears to be such a problem: we would simply recommend that it be addressed in whatever way works most effectively.

Recommendations for the College/University:

1. Deliver on commitments to diversity

The department recognizes the need to bring more diversity to the program, not only among the faculty but also among the graduate and undergraduate major populations, which remain predominantly white and male. The department has drawn up a plan for diversity recruitment, which it recognizes as its chief hiring priority, and last year mounted a target-of-opportunity search at its own expense to identify promising diversity candidates who would also serve its strategic needs. Unfortunately, no funding was forthcoming from the College to hire one of the candidates identified by this process. The university needs to provide greater support to a department that is making a determined, proactive effort to instill greater diversity in its membership and intellectual life.

2. Encourage more broad-based Discovery Themes generated by humanities faculty

We believe that the university administration recognizes the inherent bias in the original set of Discovery Themes (and the allocation of resources that flowed from them) toward STEM subjects. Steps are already being taken to redress this imbalance. But we want to underscore the importance of developing new interdisciplinary research and teaching strategies from the ground up, based on the initiative of faculty. The Constellation themes around which history department faculty has begun to reorganize its graduate and undergraduate curricula can serve as platforms not only for greater cross-field engagement within the department, but also interdisciplinary collaboration with other humanities, social sciences, and even natural sciences scholars.

3. Delegate approval of “Historical Studies” general education courses to the history department or its representatives

The replacement of one of the two history courses required for fulfillment of the General Education requirements by a “Historical Studies” alternative has contributed to the erosion in the department’s enrollments. More importantly, however, the loose standards for certifying courses under the “Historical Studies” rubric have diminished the meaning and purpose of general education. History is a discipline with its own distinct methods, theories, and intellectual heritage; it is not merely the study of “the past.” In the egregious case of the engineering course cited in the department self-report, it is clear that GE approval of such a course was intended not to fulfill the well-rounded education at the heart of a GE curriculum, but rather to avoid it. While there certainly are courses taught by faculty outside the history department that should qualify as “Historical Studies” for GE purposes, certification of such qualifications should be entrusted to the history department or a sub-committee of the College Curriculum Committee on which historians have a substantive voice.

4. Reconfigure teaching load to enable teaching of more graduate seminars

The single most frequent complaint we heard from graduate students concerned their inability to take graduate seminars, with the consequence that they are forced to take independent study courses instead. This deficiency appears to account for the striking disparity between the markedly lower-than-average evaluations graduate students have given the department for “quality of academic program” despite their higher-than-average level of overall satisfaction. Diminished graduate student enrollment combined with the requirement that graduate courses must enroll 5 students to be counted as a full course have deterred faculty from offering graduate courses, especially research seminars. The inability to benefit from interaction and shared learning with fellow students seriously impoverishes graduate student education. In order to enable faculty to teach more seminars for graduate students, we suggest that the university explore alternative means of giving credit for teaching effort—for example, giving some form of credit for teaching independent studies, chairing doctoral committees, supervising undergraduate honors theses, etc., in addition to partial credit for seminars with fewer than 5 students.

5. Improve fellowship support for graduate students to provide more time for study and research and allow more flexibility under the “continuous enrollment” policy for graduate students to conduct field research

Currently, graduate student support is provided primarily through teaching assistantships. Ph.D. students report that they routinely teach 6-10 semesters during their graduate career, which inevitably detracts from the time they can devote to study and research. Students recognize and value the competitive advantage that a strong teaching portfolio gives them in the job market, but they spend far more time in teaching than is necessary for that valid purpose. History departments at top-tier public research universities generally award 3 years of fellowship and 2 years of TAship as recruitment packages, which leaves OSU at a distinct competitive disadvantage in graduate student recruitment. While it is unlikely that OSU can match such recruitment packages, a better balance between fellowship support and TAship awards would enhance the competitiveness of the program and enable graduate students to devote more time to dissertation research. The continuous enrollment policy also has caused problems for students who (as is true for the great majority of Ph.D. students in history) must spend time in the field and away from the university to conduct dissertation research. A smoother process (via waivers or other administrative protocols) for allowing students to pursue research *in absentia* is needed.

6. Enhance the profile of the Center for Historical Research and the Goldberg Center as development priorities

The Center for Historical Research (CHR), which fosters interdisciplinary study of contemporary global issues from an historical perspective, and the Harvey Goldberg Center for Excellence in Teaching, which develops pedagogical resources, digital media projects, and public outreach programs for the department, provide invaluable support for the department’s research and teaching missions. The CHR in particular has generated national (and international) exposure for the department’s scholarly endeavors. The CHR has brought a steady stream of scholars to OSU as fellows, speakers, and postdoctoral researchers, and it has also integrated its projects with the department’s graduate and undergraduate teaching. In addition to its work in introducing new

technology and digital media to history instruction, the Goldberg Center has offered teacher training for secondary school instructors and publishes an on-line journal dedicated to historical perspectives on current events. Both of these programs have proven to be highly successful and have become models for similar initiatives elsewhere. The College has provided generous support to both programs in the past. Given their record of accomplishment and their forward-looking scholarly and pedagogical agendas, the Center for Historical Research and the Goldberg Center should be major development priorities not just for the department but for the university. Until permanent endowments for the CHR and the Goldberg Center can be secured, we urge the College to maintain or even augment its financial support of the centers.

7. Develop more transparent standards for tenure and promotion of regional campus faculty

Faculty from regional campuses with whom we spoke expressed satisfaction with the department's efforts to integrate them into its community. At the same time they noted that the additional teaching and service burdens imposed by their home campuses inevitably slowed their scholarly production, with adverse consequences for tenure and promotion (particularly the latter). The problem of higher teaching loads and multiple service responsibilities lies beyond the power of the College to control, and the department APT document recognizes that "expectations for regional campus faculty differ from those for faculty on the Columbus campus." This statement strikes us as too general, and we recommend that the college and department develop more precise and transparent standards for tenure and promotion of regional campus faculty (the majority of whom, it should be noted, are women).

8. Ensure that campus facilities (in this case the history department home in Dulles Hall) be fully accessible to the disabled

We were informed that the history department's facilities in Dulles Hall were not properly accessible to persons with disabilities. We have no way of verifying this problem, but if such a problem exists then the university has a compelling responsibility to rectify it immediately.

Recommendations for the History Department:

1. Forthrightly address the need to make hard choices to restructuring the history department programs and faculty composition in light of reduced enrollments and resources

The downsizing of the department faculty surely is a permanent change, and reflects a national pattern for public research universities. Although faculty mostly recognize that some restructuring is necessary, we believe that the department has not yet confronted the need to undertake fundamental changes in program design and faculty hiring in light of its reduced size, the reorientation of students away from humanities disciplines as traditionally constituted, and changes in the job markets for both B.A. and Ph.D. graduates. The department self-review boasts that the department offers 21 fields of specialization for Ph.D. training. This is an unsustainable model. The department cannot—and should not seek to—restore its past profile. It must adapt to new realities, and also strive to develop new synergies both within and beyond the department that transcend the traditional time/space categories of historical study. The

Constellations created initially for the purpose of restructuring graduate teaching provide a good summary of the current strengths of the department and a basis for developing interdisciplinary teaching and research. Not all Constellations have been equally successful, but the Constellation model offers a template for reimagining both the composition of the department and its pedagogy.

2. Continue to take leadership in promoting diversity among the faculty and the student body

The department has already taken a proactive role in promoting diversity among the faculty, and should persist in those efforts, especially given the lack of diversity (relative to other humanities departments at OSU and other history departments nationwide) among its undergraduate and graduate student populations.

3. Ensure equity in the department's service burden on faculty

The department self-review recognizes that the burden of departmental service has fallen unevenly, with associate professors (and especially women faculty within this cohort) assuming an inordinate share of the service duties (especially assignments that require time and effort but without corresponding decision-making authority). This pattern has yielded some benefit to the department—there is a cohort of energetic and experienced associate professors poised to assume leadership in the future—but at unacceptable cost to individuals. The department must enact procedures to ensure a more equitable apportionment of service duties among faculty, with full professors accepting greater responsibility for such tasks rather than graduating out of them.

4. Implement the strategies for increasing undergraduate enrollments outlined in the department's own report

The report on “Strategies and Best Practices for Increasing Enrollment in the Department of History” compiled in the fall 2015 semester by Program Manager Beau Brammer and Visiting Professor Mary Kupiec Cayton is a sober-minded and cogent assessment of the challenges facing the department in trying to maintain or augment its enrollment. The report outlines a range of sound strategies to address these challenges, and we strongly urge the department to implement them.

5. Develop new thematic minor fields for undergraduate students

The department already is beginning to develop minor fields that would have broad appeal to students majoring in other disciplines, including the natural sciences. The Constellations provide potential templates for the design of new thematic minors that can bridge the traditional time/place fields of historical study in addition to those, such as the newly-created “American Politics and Public Policy” minor, that are largely confined to existing field definitions.

6. Provide more research opportunities for undergraduate students

Undergraduate students with whom we spoke gave the faculty high marks for teaching and mentorship, and likewise expressed satisfaction with the department staff in providing advising

and career planning. Some voiced dissatisfaction with the lack of a broader range of courses on non-Western regions of the world. Students agreed that the current design of the history major provided a well-structured and properly progressive framework for developing their knowledge and skills. But some lamented the lack of opportunities to become more directly engaged with research through, for example, research assistantships and internships.

7. Appoint a representative of the department staff to the Workplace Climate Committee

Department staff expressed satisfaction with their jobs and reported that they felt the department faculty treated them with respect and courtesy. Nonetheless, they quickly endorsed the idea of having a staff representative on the department's Workplace Climate Committee.

8. Build bridges to other teaching and research units to diminish the department's isolation

We came away with the impression that the department was relatively isolated from other units and programs at the university. Faculty in some fields of study—for example East Asia, Islamic, Jewish, Women's—seemed to have considerable engagement with colleagues in their respective regional/subject areas, but there also seem to be missed opportunities for collaborative work beyond the department. For example, it was surprising that the *Origins* online newsmagazine had no connection to the public policy school despite their clearly convergent interests. Future planning for Discovery Themes and possible joint B.A./M.A. programs will require more aggressive efforts to build bridges to other teaching and research units.

Respectfully submitted,

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