

Academic Program Review of the
History Department
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

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Prepared by the Academic Program Review Subcommittee:

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The Self Study for the History Department was completed January of 2007. An external site review by Kate Lang from UW-Eau Claire was done in April, 2007. The self study, external review and the History Department chair's response to the review were all received by the Dean's office in November, 2007.

Summary of the Self-Study

The purpose of the History Department is to provide leadership in history education and scholarship by encouraging the critical thinking and analytical skills necessary for interpreting historical evidence and research with a global perspective.

The History Department works toward the following goals and objectives:

- Critical thinking
- Written communication skills
- Integration of knowledge
- Global perspective
- Abilities and skills to conduct research

The program achieves these goals and objectives by offering a wide variety of courses including General Education courses, courses supporting the history majors, courses for the Public History minor as well as courses supporting teacher education, archives, and museum studies.

Programs

The History Department offers the following programs:

- History Major (BA and BS)
- History Major with regional emphasis (BA and BS)
- History Minor
- History Minor with regional emphasis
- Public History minor

The History Department majors are 40 credits, the minor and Public History minor are 24 credits. There are currently 213 majors and 96 minors.

Notable Strengths and Weaknesses:

The History Department strengths include:

- Global curriculum
- Public History minor with internships
- Assessment plan
- Teaching American History grants
- Oral History program
- Institute for Latina/o Latin American Studies
- Wisconsin Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution Studies program
- support for the Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies, Archeology and Environmental Studies programs.

The History Department's weaknesses include:

- Workload and staffing issues
- Facilities and supplies and equipment deficiencies

Curriculum

The curriculum includes the History 101 and 102 General Education courses (required for all University students), courses in European, Asian, African, Latin American, Ancient and United States regional histories, topical history courses and era specific courses. Research seminars have resulted in a variety of undergraduate research projects.

Assessment of Student learning

The History Department has developed and implemented an assessment plan that includes direct assessments of departmental student learning outcomes on an annual basis. Regular assessment of the HIS 101 and 102 General Education courses is a special focus of the department considering the significant SCH that these classes generate. Courses are assessed directly through written examples showing written communication skills, critical thinking skills, integration of knowledge, global perspective and understanding of diversity. Indirect assessment measures include applications to graduate programs, interest in internship programs and involvement in undergraduate research grant competitions.

Previous Program Review and New Program Initiatives

The previous academic review of the History Department brought up the following concerns:

- The availability of sequentially offered General Education courses
- The number of History majors
- Implementation of an assessment plan
- Faculty load
- Tracking of graduates

New program initiatives have addressed most of the concerns raised in the previous program review.

- The new General Education HIS 101 and 102 courses have addressed the problem of availability by offering temporal and thematic approaches instead of sequential ones.
- The number of History majors has increased significantly
- Direct and indirect assessment plans are in place and being utilized by the department.
- Faculty load is still an ongoing concern
- The History Department has not changed its method of tracking graduates

Personnel

The History Department has 11 FTE. The History faculty members are very active in research and scholarship as indicated by the many publications, presentations, grants and faculty development activities that they are involved in. The faculty have also been involved in numerous faculty governance and university service activities.

Support for Achieving Academic Goals

The History Department is housed in Carl Wimberly Hall and uses several classrooms. The classrooms need to be modernized with new audio/visual and media stations. The library resources for the department are not adequate.

Comments on the External Review

The external review of the History Department found that the History Department has an extremely active and productive faculty in terms of teaching, scholarship and service. They have a strong commitment to Global History and a clear philosophy of curriculum that starts globally and then focuses on regional and topical studies. They have developed a model assessment plan. The department has had climate issues in the past but has worked through them and seems to currently be working well. The reviewer recommends that the department continue this trend by including collaborative endeavors like retreats to build collegiality and unity. The department should look to create a History major student group to increase a feeling of community.

The students show a great degree of satisfaction with the History Department. The faculty are available for questions, advising and general help and the department has a thorough and informative webpage.

The transitional state of the department in terms of faculty is a concern and there should be an effort to convert academic staff positions to faculty. The workload of faculty is also a concern. The commitment to inquiry-based learning is labor intensive and an integral part to a liberal arts education. Group writing projects might be an option for helping in this area. A target SCH that is in line with similar institutions should be developed for the department. The department's facilities are not adequate; there is a need for audio/video equipment in the classrooms and the budget for library resources should be increased.

There are still concerns regarding scheduling and availability of classes.

Weaknesses

- Problems in scheduling, availability of courses
- Need for FTE in American History

Comments on the Dean's Letter

The Dean's letter generally reiterates the positive tone of the external review. She comments favorably on the productivity and contemporary relevance of the department, including the quality of faculty research, development of curriculum and success of its assessment plan.

Parallel to the recognition of department's successes is a reiteration of the department's concerns, noting that workload, staff support, increases in S&E budgets and facilities will need to be addressed if the department is to continue functioning at its current level of success. She further indicates that the department should provide a more comprehensive strategy in the timely offering of its classes and that the department should continue to work on the development of a collegial work environment.

The dean's primary solutions are tied to the University's adoption and success of the "Growth, Quality and Access" Agenda.

Recommendations from the Academic Program Review Committee

The Department of History functions at a high level of success in its curriculum offerings, faculty research and scholarship, assessment and program development.

As noted in the Dean's letter, it is recommended that the department:

1. Continue to submit requests for new faculty lines
2. Provide a class scheduling plan several semesters into the future
3. Develop assessment plans specific to the public history minor

4. Continue to be attentive to collegiality in the department and develop a more effective mentoring program for junior faculty and faculty of color

There are no serious areas to address (with great immediacy). The department should continue on its current well conceived path and undergo its next Academic Program Review in the next regularly scheduled cycle.