

WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

PROGRAM REVIEW TEAM REPORT

March 15, 2012

STANDARD A - MISSION STATEMENT

History is the record of political, social, economic, and cultural events and achievements of humankind. Historians analyze and evaluate this record in an attempt to understand and interpret the present. The Department's chief goal, therefore, is to transmit both the content of history and the necessary analytical and interpretive skills to its students. More specifically, the Department seeks to prepare students for careers in teaching and history-related fields and to provide courses that contribute to the general education and lifelong learning of all students.

The Department, therefore, provides undergraduate programs for students wishing to complete degrees that include the History Major, History Teaching Major, History Minor, History Teaching Minor, Public History Minor, and Social Science Composite Teaching Major. It also provides courses that contribute substantially to the University's commitment to General Education and cultural diversity, promote a general interest in the study of History, assist students in achieving their college and career goals, and fulfill the state's American Institutions requirement to promote the development of an informed citizenry. The History Department also takes an active role in providing appropriate services, resources, and activities to the region that the University serves.

The Department of History's Mission Statement captures many of the critical roles that faculty and staff play in the university's activities, and clearly defines the discipline of History and the programs offered by the unit. The statement could be streamlined by removing the 'therefore' phrases, which lessen its impact. The last two sentences could be revised to be more specifically representative of the History Department's unique strengths, including its significant, ongoing, and successful outreach efforts and the breadth and substance of the Department's important service to the region.

Program Review Team members suggest that the Mission Statement tie the Department's public service role more precisely to recent national initiatives in higher education. Reflecting programs sponsored by the Association of American Colleges & Universities, the Lumina Foundation for Education, and the William & Flora Hewitt Foundation, History should consider highlighting its rich contribution to "civic engagement." We find that the Department is ahead of the national curve in this area. The Department demonstrates civic engagement in at least four ways: the strong and continuous contribution its faculty make to the "American Institutions" requirement in the state of Utah; the history education it carries to the broader

public through its on- and off-campus lecture series; the service that its public history program provides to popular museums, agencies, archives, and organizations in northern Utah; and the remarkably extensive professional development faculty provide to K-12 teachers in the area (in projects that connect university faculty with a wide community of educators and that offer meaningful, substantive content to the lessons school children receive in their classes). Indeed, the History Department is uniquely situated to provide key leadership in national discussions regarding instructional alignment and higher education collaborations with K-12.

All history classrooms model a key feature of civic life that fills a critical need in contemporary America: the role of civil dialogue. With its modestly-sized upper-division classes, flexible course formats that allow for a seminar-like setting, and thoughtful faculty who guide classroom debates, the Weber State History Department helps its undergraduates understand the conduct and character of “civil” public discussion. Students gain a greater appreciation for the ways in which dialogue on complex issues needs to proceed on a basis of evidence (rather than mere assertion), mutual respect (rather than rude behavior), clear communication (rather than disjointed argument), and self-critical reflection (rather than claims to absolute truth). The Department’s commitment to student-focused instruction allows this important civic education and discourse to occur in its classrooms, and it provides a model for the interaction of civic engagement and teaching in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Civic engagement, quality instruction, and public scholarship are clear strengths of the Department and should be highlighted in its Mission Statement.

The Review Team found through its interviews with administration and faculty that the Department is moving toward a more research-oriented focus. The Mission Statement does not mention the Department’s commitment to research. We feel that the Department faculty’s role in creating new knowledge, interpreting historical materials for public audiences, and publishing historical scholarship should be incorporated into the Mission Statement.

STANDARD B—CURRICULUM

The History Department at Weber State University offers the Bachelors of Arts in History and History Teaching Major; History and History Teaching Minor; Social Science Composite Teaching Major; and the Public History Minor. In addition, it cooperates in the delivery of the interdisciplinary programs Bachelor of Integrated Studies; Asian Studies Minor; Latin American Studies Minor; European Studies Minor; and Women’s Studies Minor. The Department makes its programs and courses accessible to as many students as possible. The Department offers online courses, Independent Study courses, and teaches many classes at satellite campus locations, including the Davis Campus and the West Center. In addition, it participates in the university’s concurrent enrollment program.

The Department’s major and minor programs are supported by five three-credit lower-division courses in World and U.S. History and American Institutions. The Review Team found that at least 50% of the Department’s teaching offerings each semester are lower-division General

Education and University Core offerings. These courses meet the needs of History major and minor students with the exception of the American Institutions course, which is a General Education course but does not meet requirements for the majors or minors in History. Thus a significant amount of the Department's teaching provides service to the University as opposed to its own majors. As is the case with most other Weber State departments, the History Department's lower-division courses are taught by the Department's full-time, tenure-track faculty, which sets the Department and Weber State apart from most of its peers. The commitment of the core faculty to lower-division students provides consistency for assessment and an opportunity to recruit History majors.

The Department offers an impressive array of upper-division courses:

North-America: 24 upper-division courses, including a Special Topics number
Europe: 18 upper-division courses, including a Special Topics number
Global and Comparative: 10 upper-division courses, including a Special Topics number
Other Electives: 2 upper-division public history courses, and 7 other courses, including Directed Readings, Internships, Cooperative Work Experience, Short Courses, and Workshops

Department faculty members offer each upper-division course at least once every two years, with the exception of the required methods and capstone courses for majors, which are taught every semester.

The Department is committed to its curriculum and to regular curricular review. In 2010, for example, the Department voted to eliminate the B.S. program and only offer a B.A. program. That policy was implemented in August 2011. The Review Team commends this decision. In difficult budgetary times, it is sensible for a department to focus on the work it does best—and the work that is tied essentially to its discipline. We agree that History's humanistic orientation is best served through the Bachelor of Arts degree program.

The Review Team found one area of concern regarding curriculum during its review. The faculty reported that in order to continue to fulfill the full range of courses, especially in world history, additional faculty resources are needed. The faculty frequently referred to the need to offer Middle Eastern history, which is not currently an area supported by faculty expertise. In addition, the faculty cited a need to preserve the future of Latin American history in the Department in relation to imminent retirements. It is essential that comprehensive undergraduate history departments maintain breadth in coverage, particularly in non-United States and non-European areas.

STANDARD C - STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND ASSESSMENT

Assessment is a real strength of the Department of History at Weber State. The Department has been committed to the assessment of its lower-division and program requirements for

many years, and has created a clear and mission-driven approach to assessment activities. The Department has demonstrated that it assesses its curriculum, programs, and courses on a regular and systematic basis. The Department has identified learning outcomes for its programs, and it assesses the degree to which students accomplish these outcomes at multiple points in the curriculum. Assessment occurs in the introductory general education courses and within the senior capstone project. In addition, the Department uses exit interviews to assess the program and conducts annual reviews of the data gathered from all of the assessment points. The Review Team was provided with copies of the assessment tools and surveys employed by the Department, which show that the Department's programs are meeting learning objectives.

The Department frequently reviews the quality and effectiveness of its assessment efforts, and makes changes when needed. The Department is currently implementing changes to the assessment of its senior capstone course.

The Review Team has one suggestion regarding assessment. While the Department has an exceptionally strong record on assessment, the Department of History's web page does not have a section devoted to the subject (at least not one that the Review Team could locate). Considering the importance of assessment in general discussions of higher education *and* the focus of History's major professional organization (the American Historical Association), it may be helpful for the Department to briefly refer to the fact that it conducts assessment of its programs on its web page, perhaps spelling out the broad learning outcomes for the discipline as well as displaying the varied tools faculty have developed for monitoring student learning. The Department may wish to highlight the state role it plays in the area of assessment, and/or provide a link to the Office of the Provost at Weber State for information regarding assessment.

STANDARD D - ACADEMIC ADVISING

The Department of History maintains a strong focus on student success. Its programs go beyond advising to a more holistic approach to student retention and graduation rates. The Department participates in campus major fairs and similar events, while maintaining its own advising system.

The Department should be commended for its conscientious attention to the advising recommendations made during the last five-year review. The Department works closely with the university's orientation and admissions staff to identify new majors and minors. The Department has created a faculty advisor position, currently held by Dr. Brady Brower, so that students have a consistent point of contact for faculty advising. This system was instituted following the previous five-year review and has proved to be a successful approach for the unit. The Department maintains clear advising publications outlining the path to its major and minor degree programs. The Department Chair, Office Manager (Angela Swaner), and Faculty Advisor also provide information about History career opportunities and the many student

organizations available on campus. The Department recently reviewed its advising processes (2010) and made the following changes:

1. Created a new guide to careers for history majors. Angela Swaner has taken the lead on this, gathering information and compiling it in an accessible form, both in print and online formats.
2. Created a course on “The Business of History” which will help students think creatively about the skills they can offer to prospective employers. The course will introduce students to the connections between historical research and analysis and the needs of the business workplace.
3. Developed several new internships over the past three years with local and regional museums, historical and cultural sites, and businesses which we hope will equip students with the skills and experience to make their way in this tight job market.
4. Invested in a range of testing aids and preparation guides for students taking the PRAXIS (national tests taken by students seeking education certification) exam and have established a lending library of sorts. Students can check out the materials to help them study for the exam.

The Department assesses the effectiveness of its advising structures with a series of advising questions on the exit interview questionnaire that it gives to all majors and minors. Responses during the past several years have particularly highlighted the helpfulness of the Department’s Office Manager, Angela Swaner, who is by all accounts a highly valuable member of the History Department. The students we interviewed, moreover, also cited the value of Ms. Swaner’s advising and assistance.

The students we interviewed were very satisfied with the Department’s advising and felt they had been given ample information about their programs and future career opportunities. The Review Team has no concerns or recommendations regarding the Department’s Advising program and commends the Department for the successes it enjoys in this area.

STANDARDS E and F – FACULTY and PROGRAM SUPPORT

The Department of History is supported by a very dedicated and productive faculty. Our interviews with faculty members revealed that they enjoy their students and are continually looking for ways to improve teaching. Despite a 4/4 teaching load, all of the faculty we interviewed cited important ways that they contribute to scholarly activity, including public scholarship and widely distributed publications.

Faculty cited concerns about thin operating budgets, particularly in the area of travel, and about the deplorable state of their building (which they share with other social sciences units).

Among their building concerns were poor heating, cooling, and ventilation; crowded conditions; inadequate classroom facilities and space; and seasonal insect infestations, including flies and wasps. These problems have an adverse impact, the faculty noted, on student success and retention.

During our meeting with the Dean of the College, it became clear that the vision for the college is to move in a more research-oriented direction. Dean Harrold stressed his interest in encouraging faculty to explore any and all avenues of external support available in different fields. The review team reminded the dean of two discipline-specific points: that grants for historical scholarship typically amount to small sums of money compared to funds available in other areas of study (because research “costs” are quite low—and low-tech—in conventional archival work); and funding in history grants rarely covers indirect or overhead costs that show up on university budget sheets. While recognizing the modest nature of history support, the department should still adopt an important pro-active stance: by compiling clear information about all grants *sought* by history faculty as well as all grants *received* by department members.

We recommend that additional incentives for scholarship be instituted at the department and/or college level, including opportunities to access travel funding (perhaps through competitive means at the college level) and possibly release time support. Our research indicates that the university-wide 4/4 teaching load is not consistently defined across colleges. Other colleges may not be as insistent on making sure that each faculty member have precisely 12 TCH credit loads, but rather that the average TCH load for each member of the faculty in a department is about 12/semester. The Utah Board of Regents defines workload policy as an average for all faculty (Utah Board of Regents Policies, Academic Affairs, 4.1.2.), suggesting that there may be some flexibility in workload assignments on a semester-by-semester basis as long as the Department’s average is maintained at 12 credits per semester per full-time faculty member.

Low faculty salaries were also identified by faculty as a potential morale issue. The 2006 review team made note of the exceptionally low salaries received by the faculty of the History Department. The problem remains in 2012. The Review Team understands how difficult it has been (and may continue to be) to address salary needs at the institution. It is not clear from faculty comments or our research how salaries are managed across colleges, but the perception that there are differences and inequities between colleges—and within the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences—has contributed to lower morale. In addition, History’s faculty may be more inclined to seek additional sources of revenue such as overload or summer teaching, as well as on-line opportunities. This should have the understandable result of there being even less time available for scholarly pursuits. [Nevertheless, the quality and quantity of faculty scholarship in this Department is enormously impressive, as evidenced by the acclaimed books that have been published.]

Low salaries in History are compounded by the embarrassingly low salary received by the department’s talented—and essential—office manager, Angela Swaner. Ms. Swaner exudes a warm, welcoming spirit and seemingly endless energy as she attends to the accounting

requirements of her job, the paperwork of tracking departmental business, the coordination of History's special activities sponsored by History, and the advising services she provides to students. She draws no attention to herself in these multiple tasks; but it is clear that the department could not function well (or long) without her guidance. Yet her \$21,000 salary is shamefully low for such an invaluable member of an institution's support team.

Due to the recent economic situation, History is down in its faculty numbers by one individual. The Review Team recognizes that funding for the expansion of faculty lines is enormously challenging for the institution as a whole. We recommend, however, that the History Department take an important first step in this process. The department head should convene a special meeting in the near future to discuss a single subject: prioritizing possible future faculty lines. Faculty should have a clear and unified sense of where they want to go in the coming years *should* additional monies be available for a new line.

At the same time, though, there are individuals who are not full-time departmental faculty but who take part in its assignments and advising. For example, Dr. Kathy Payne, who has a PhD in history, is on the Library faculty. She contributes a great degree of time and effort to the History Department. In addition to serving as a key resource for its faculty and students, she advises students on scholarly projects. If she were to leave or retire, in essence the Department would be losing a valued member. While it is always beneficial to have such serendipitous assistance, this circumstance ought to be considered when evaluating the Department's needs. If and when Dr. Payne leaves, it is arguable that the History Department should be granted another faculty slot in hers or a related area.

The Review Team would like to add that the faculty are in clear agreement about the positive and effective leadership provided by Dr. Susan Matt. She is a superb role-model for the Department. Given that she has expressed interest in not continuing to serve as Chair for much longer, it would be wise to determine who else might be interested in this crucial position, and even begin a transition toward the end of whatever she feels is her last term.

STANDARD G - RELATIONSHIPS WITH EXTERNAL COMMUNITIES

The Department does a phenomenal job of interacting with external constituencies, including K-12, local high schools through dual enrollment, and local and regional historical societies. As noted above, civic engagement and public outreach are significant strengths for the Department.

In the area of outreach and development, the Review Team has two recommendations. We recommend that the History Department try to cultivate as strong a set of ties to its large alumni community as possible. The department might wish to consider a strategy used by colleagues in the History Department of Utah State University: gathering an email list of alumni; asking them to participate in a survey related to assessment; and posing questions about the knowledge, skills, and competencies alumni developed – or wished they had cultivated – while

they were students. The project proved to be very useful in building good will (and useful information) from alumni on the Logan campus. In addition, the Department might consider creating an Advisory Board populated by alumni and local business owners in order to cultivate friends and donors and to create avenues for community advice on issues pertaining to development.

Secondly, with an active and engaged undergraduate honor society (Phi Alpha Theta), the department should consider tapping into the student organization as a forum for presentations focused on “life after the B.A.” Annual meetings sponsored by PAT might gather students together to hear faculty discuss the basics of graduate school or the shifting nature of the job market. It might also prove encouraging to students to hear from alumni who could be invited back to campus to talk about the directions their lives took after graduating with a history major.

All in all, the Review Team is very impressed with the outreach capabilities and efforts of the Department.

STANDARD H - PROGRAM SUMMARY

As evidenced above, the Review Team commends the Department on its responses to its previous program review. All of the recommendations were taken into account and addressed. Concerning the programmatic recommendations of the 2006 reviewers, the faculty has clearly responded to each of the four suggestions made by the 2006 Review Team:

- creating the sequence of capstone courses recommended by reviewers (in order to better prepare students for the rigors of a senior thesis);
- revising its program of advisement (that was lauded by the students with whom we spoke);
- compiling an extensive and thorough collection of printed and online materials to guide students through the increasingly difficult problem of life choices after the baccalaureate;
- and exploring ways of creating flexibility in faculty roles and workloads (especially by acknowledging the teaching contributions of faculty that had been unrecognized earlier).

PROGRAM REVIEW TEAM SUMMARY

The Program Review Team appreciated the opportunity to meet and review this highly productive and hardworking department. We offer our congratulations to the unit for its negotiation of the recent budget challenges in ways that did not impede its continued support of teaching and students. We also give special recognition to the Department for its impressive outreach programs.

Considering the difficulties facing higher education nationally, it was refreshing to hear so much good news about the History Department's status—and the sense of confidence faculty expressed about the future:

- Instructors, staff, and students all reported a renewed sense of energy in the department that has come from recent hires who have brought fresh research specialties and vigorous commitment to the classroom.
- Faculty appear quite pleased with the types of teaching assignments they receive. It was especially encouraging to hear that everyone in the faculty teaches survey courses, that the group shares responsibility for this important work, and that they view the general education courses as a valuable way of recruiting majors into the program.
- We also heard strong and confident reports about the talents of the adjunct faculty members who are responsible for approximately one-quarter of the classes taught in the Department.
- The Department also does its best to offer some minimal travel support for adjuncts so they can continue to present cutting-edge research at history conferences.
- Recognizing the open admission policy of the institution – and the wide range of students who enter Weber State – faculty were highly impressed with the caliber of their undergraduates and the talents students bring into (and develop) through their study.

To conclude, the Review Team enjoyed meeting all of the Weber State Faculty. We were impressed with record and quality of scholarship that has emerged from a department whose members bear a heavy 4-4 teaching load.

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