

Dean's Response

History Department Program Review

May 5, 2017

I appreciate the work of the review team (Drs. Katherine Aiken and Paul Reeve) in producing the program review, and of the Department of History in writing the self-study and department response.

The review team's report gives an overall strongly positive assessment of the work of the department, a view that I very much share.

Mission

The review team finds that the department has a clear and appropriate mission statement, one that is consistent with those of the College and the University. They note that, in response to their last program review, the faculty added a statement emphasizing the importance of historical research and publication. Indeed, they emphasize that the department responded to all suggestions by the prior review team that were in their power to effect.

Curriculum

The report concludes that the History curriculum, revised after the last program review, is cohesive, broad, and well organized. The team especially commends the public history minor and its internship opportunities, unique in the state. They do express concern at the light coverage of Middle Eastern history in the curriculum, a concern shared by the department. As a line becomes available in the department, I would be receptive to the case for a faculty hire in that area. They also suggest folding "digital literacy," as a necessary skill, into the curriculum, suggesting further that it could be a secondary specialization of the department's next hire. The department agrees that, while digital literacy is treated in their "Craft of History" course, it will be further integrated into the curriculum.

Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment

The review team finds the department's assessment process "nothing short of exemplary" – coherent, well organized and administered, and "well ahead of most history departments..." This is a major departmental strength.

Academic Advising

Regarding the department's successful single-advisor system, the report commends the department on its successful Career Day, begun in response to the last program review. It suggests publicizing the availability of the advisor to all students, which the department will do, and requiring majors to consult with the advisor each semester. The department replies that such mandatory advising for its large number of majors is not feasible without additional advising resources. The same can be said at the College and University levels. Last year I hired a second College advisor, but we still lack the capacity to advise each student every semester.

Faculty

I agree with the review team that the department faculty are highly-qualified, “devoted teachers and engaged researchers.” The review team judges that the University “offers little institutional support for professional development...” While our resources are clearly more modest than those of many private institutions or public research universities, we have taken steps in the College and the University to support research and professional development. Since the last program review, I have raised amount of travel money annually available to faculty by \$200 per faculty member. Faculty may also apply to the Dean’s Office for additional support, especially for foreign or unusually expensive travel. The WSU Research, Scholarship and Professional Growth Committee awards funding on a competitive basis for research and professional development. The College also encourages faculty to seek outside grant and fellowship support, with a stipend for a proposal submitted through the Office of Sponsored Programs. One such stipend was recently awarded to a History Department faculty member.

I am pleased to see the report commend the department for its support of adjunct faculty. It also suggests that faculty members guest-lecture in concurrent enrollment classes, a suggestion the department will adopt.

Program support

The review team notes the low salary of the department secretary, who is strong contributor to the program’s success. They recognize that this is a systemic problem, and suggest beginning to raise the salary of the most senior department secretary one year, then that of the next most senior secretary the next year, and so on. This is an interesting idea which I will explore, though I would note that with 13 staff members in the College, junior people would need to wait a long time to see such a raise.

The report recognizes that the librarian liaison to the department, herself a historian, is a major resource. It also documents History faculty dissatisfaction with their level of input on Library policies and procedures, and suggest a faculty library committee to supply such input. I agree that this is a constructive idea. I encourage the department to suggest this idea (as will I) to the new Dean of the Library, who is expected to begin this summer.

External relationships

The report praises the department’s “vibrant internship program,” which connects the department to many external partners. I would cite as well the close relationship between the department and the Weber Historical Society, whose lectures the department co-sponsors, and the Lampros Lectures in 19th century U.S. history, which draw a large community audience. Additionally, I can cite the department chair’s longtime participation in the Venture classes offered to community members, and History faculty lectures to community groups, such as Dr. Little’s well-attended lecture in April on America and World War I at Ogden’s Union Station.

Program summary

The review team praises the department’s maintenance of its number of majors, while suggesting concerted efforts to recruit majors in its Gen Ed classes, which the department and I favor. They also call for more competitive salaries for the faculty. The picture here is mixed. On one hand, deans rarely receive the resources to address broadly faculty salary issues. On the other hand, since the last History program review, former Provost Vaughan took two steps to address salary issues among mid-career and senior faculty. One was to increase the raise accompanying

promotion to full professor from \$5,000 to \$10,000. The other was to institute the Performance Compensation Program, whereby full professors can apply over time for up to two \$5,000 raises based on strong professional performance. These changes have already benefited faculty members in the History Department.

The report closes with recognition of the strong leadership provided to the department during Dr. Matt's nine years as chair. I fully concur, and look forward to continuing successful leadership under the incoming chair, Dr. Dant.

In sum, the review team and I agree that the History Department is a very strong one, with no major problems to confront. As it takes steps to institute suggestions from the review team, I am ready to lend my support.