

History Program Review

Faculty of Humanities, College of Arts

Dean's Summary

Submitted by:

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Program and Unit Review: History

Dean's Summary Report

Dr. Jacqueline Nolte

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In May 2012 the Program Review Committee conducted a site visit as part of a Program Review of the History Department. Members of the Program Review Committee included members from other Canadian Universities and one internal member from another department.

Overview

The overall assessment of the Program Review Committee was that the History Department has the potential to become one of Canada's top undergraduate programs but that it has much to do internally and externally. The Committee was impressed by the commitment to quality teaching demonstrated by faculty and administration and by the enthusiasm that students demonstrated for the program and instructors. However, a number of structural and systemic weaknesses were identified.

A central recommendation was that the department conduct a curriculum mapping and innovation exercise aimed at revitalizing a largely traditional set of courses and delivery options. The department was encouraged to abandon geography as the primary criterion for organizing the program in favour of an approach that emphasizes historical genres, thematic synergies, and an emphasis on local engagement. Work done with local communities was identified as a major strength, in alignment with UFV's strategic plan. The Committee suggested that a practical, applied experiential learning stream would set UFV History apart from neighbouring History programs. The Committee recommended faculty members become more actively engaged in the wider historical community in Canada, thereby developing a reputation for its teacher-scholars. UFV was encouraged to find better ways of supporting professional development opportunities and applications for externally-funded research. UFV was challenged to ensure its Heads act more effectively as department leaders so as to be able to implement departmental and university standards. The Committee suggested that program outcomes be measured and that History majors be tracked over a four year period.

What follows is a detailed summary of recommendations and actions that are planned as a response to these recommendations.

A. Curriculum/Pedagogy/Program

The Committee included the following as curriculum strengths: breadth of offerings; commitment to multidisciplinary; the applied nature of the program; the overall integrity of the program. The Committee commended the creation of department learning outcomes but was critical of the lack of relationship between these and individual courses. It suggested that the outcomes be communicated to students to help them select and understand the value of a History major. The Committee commended the department on time spent with students out of class and in small class settings, and on its hands-on/experiential courses, specifically the Stó:lō course and the Local History on the Web course. It recognized innovative modes of delivery but suggested a greater use of these.

Recommendation 1: reduce the number of courses offered with a view to creating a collection of more general courses that faculty can rotate into their teaching load.

Action: the department will engage in a curriculum mapping exercise; faculty will evaluate courses, note areas of overlap, revise courses and reduce course offerings, which will allow more than one person to teach upper level courses.

Recommendation 2: develop thematic courses to allow for the integration of geographic areas.

Action: thematic courses will be developed at the third year.

Recommendation 3: focus on fewer areas and become known for these, and/or come up with more innovative approaches to curriculum offerings such as the thematic suggestion above.

Action: thematic courses will be privileged over geographic but the department will ensure students graduate with a sense of geographic breadth; breadth requirements of the program are under review.

Recommendation 4: create more general interest first year course to attract non-majors.

Action: popular courses will be scheduled annually.

Recommendation 5: create courses that are mandatory and restricted to majors only.

Action: an introductory skills-based course will be developed as a mandatory courses for majors and honours.

Recommendation 6: create an introductory 1st year methods course that is primarily skills-based.

Action: see above.

Recommendation 7: refrain from designing courses and assignments exclusively for majors destined for graduate school.

Action: see #4.

Recommendation 8: create more blended learning courses and permanent faculty to pursue professional development in the area of online course design and delivery.

Action: History students are not particularly successful in their online courses and attrition rates are higher than face to face courses; the department will continue to offer the four lower level courses it offers online and develop one more lower level course online; it will place greater emphasis on hybrid courses, predominantly at the upper-level; several instructors are either currently offering “flipped” courses or are moving in that direction.

Recommendation 9: provide a list of upcoming courses one or two academic years in advance to address student complaints about courses not being offered due to rotation.

Action: courses will be advertised at least 1-2 years ahead of scheduling.

Recommendation 10: develop courses for students who plan to go into teaching.

Action: the department will focus on streamlining courses for TEP students; a fourth year seminar on the scholarship of teaching History will be developed for these students.

Recommendation 11: shift current 3rd year methods class to the second year level, and ensure it is primarily a critical theory/methods class.

Action: a critical theory/methods course will be included in the Honours program but it has not been decided if it will be required in the major. This course has the added advantage of satisfying the reasoning requirement currently part of the BA; the department will consider revising the course to ensure that it offers a wider set of skills; it will consider offering a new first-year course which covers the basics of theory, method, and historical skills while keeping the upper level option.

Recommendation 12: review prerequisite requirements to counteract low enrollments and to enable a thematic program option to be overlaid on the current geographical options.

Action: prerequisites of all courses will be reviewed; the Dean is of the opinion that the department has been one of the most proactive departments in lifting onerous prerequisites; the shift to outcomes based courses and programs will assist the department in continuing to review prerequisites.

Recommendation 13: review grade distribution due to the relatively high averages overall.

Action: grade distribution will be reviewed; the department will speak with IR to explore measuring the impact of pedagogy on grades.

Recommendation 14: integrate more skills-based, experiential and active learning strategies into courses, particularly for a non-major audience.

Action: experiential learning will be promoted through: instructors informing themselves of possibilities; inviting guest speakers to talk about active and experiential learning applied studies; organizing study abroad (advertising this initiative has already taken effect) and international study courses; incorporating practical learning in the classroom.

Recommendation 15: explore alternative strategies for assessing content knowledge and explain use of quizzes as an assessment strategy to students.

Action: many department members employ alternative pedagogical approaches yet the Committee failed to note this; the department will encourage those members who practice such innovative pedagogy to share alternative methods of instruction and assessment with others; the department has held workshops on problem-based learning, members have attended workshops on writing and the department is planning sessions on assessment.

Recommendation 16: develop additional laddering of assignments.

Action: the department will attend to laddering of assignments in Spring 2013.

Recommendation 17: offer more active learning opportunities, including additional field trips.

Action: see #14.

Recommendation 18: demonstrate on course outlines and syllabi what outcomes will be addressed and how these will be measured.

Action: courses will be reviewed with a view to including learning outcomes and skills.

Recommendation 19: devise outcome assessment strategies.

Action: discussion on developing and measuring outcomes is underway; learning outcomes align with ILOs but ways of measuring these has not been addressed; the department anticipates that year three of the ILO process will assist in this regard; in the interim, the College of Arts will begin discussion on measuring outcomes.

Recommendation 20: The Review Committee recommended that a Master's program not be pursued at this time. The cost of the program will be far too high to be competitive and it would be very difficult to deliver a Master's program with current and projected resources. The development of the Master's program might also bring with it the possibility of the History Department losing their biggest strength—their focus on undergraduate education. Student demand does not support the introduction of a Masters, library holdings are not sufficient and the current level of research output of the department, as a whole, was regarded as inadequate for purposes of graduate supervision. The department was encouraged to explore the possibility of a joint graduate program in which individual faculty members could participate.

Action: The department will be exploring the creation of an Honours Program in place of a Masters program.

B. Student Experience

The Review Committee noted the overall satisfaction of students and their appreciation of the mentorship of committed faculty members. The Committee was impressed that the majority of classes are taught by full-time faculty members and that supported learning groups are available to students. The department was commended for the number of independent study opportunities and for the research opportunities it has provided. The Committee noted that students with UFV History degrees are doing well in both the job market and graduate studies and that faculty members care about their students' post-UFV lives and work to provide them with the tools and confidence they need to succeed.

Recommendation 1: encourage more students to pursue study abroad and offer international travel study courses.

Action: see A14 above.

Recommendation 2: encourage a greater sense of community among History students.

Action: the department has launched a series of student friendly initiatives to promote a greater sense of community amongst students.

Recommendation 3: provide more opportunities for students to take part in governance.

Action: the President of the students' History Association will attend department meetings.

Recommendation 4: provide a place for History students to gather and work together.

Action: the Dean has advocated for a seminar room for History students at Campus Planning.

Recommendation 5: ensure that faculty members are aware of funding available to hire student researchers and that students are alerted to research assistant opportunities.

Action: better information will be provided about opportunities for research and RA positions.

Recommendation 6: incorporate more hands-on research and networking opportunities as part of all course work.

Action: students will be alerted to volunteer and paid opportunities within the community; this is part of coursework in HIST 401.

Recommendation 7: encourage students to present research at undergraduate research conferences.

Action: students will be encouraged to present research at department and institutional functions such as the History Department's Roundtable Series and the Micro-Lecture Series.

Recommendation 8: highlight the value and many uses of a History degree through a range of communication strategies.

Action: this has been addressed on the web and in marketing brochures.

Recommendation 9: ensure students benefit from a more formal structure of advice from History faculty and the Advising and Career centres regarding post graduation opportunities and job possibilities.

Action: see #8 and # 12; print materials on the co-op program are now available for students and co-op sessions will be planned for students.

Recommendation 10: make greater use of social media and for recruitment purposes.

Action: the Head and Assistant have been using social media to communicate with students, posting news stories, job opportunities, games etc.

Recommendation 11: support the creation of a student History society.

Action: a strong student association has been formed for the coming year.

Recommendation 12: create embedded faculty advisors in the department.

Action: a faculty member will be designated as a liaison person to work with Arts Advice; the department will establish a committee to explore options for student advising including the idea of rotating faculty volunteers.

Recommendation 13: begin to cross list courses; this will help provide the foundation for a multidisciplinary program in Indigenous Studies and help with recruitment.

Action: the department will consider cross-listing HIST 103 when the new Indigenous Studies Degree is launched and will look at opportunities for service courses for this degree.

Recommendation 14: find out from Aboriginal students why they are not enrolling in History courses and consider methods to attract Aboriginal students; hold office hours/events in the Aboriginal Resource Centre; consider the creation of Special Topics/Issues courses of interest to Aboriginal students.

Action: the department will create greater links between Aboriginal students and the History Department and will survey Aboriginal students' responses to their History classes.

Recommendation 15: organize a department Diversity Committee to promote understanding of the various forms that diversity can take, to promote diversity and to ensure integration of diversity across the curriculum.

Action: the department did not see a need to pay particular attention to issues of diversity, feeling these were well addressed within course syllabi even if not explicitly mentioned in course outlines; however, the department will highlight these on the web page, pointing out to students the courses that cover these issues.

Recommendation 16: ensure that students and faculty members are aware of the student award opportunities available both internally and externally to the University.

Action: the website has been updated to highlight all current awards and how to apply for them.

C. Enrollment/Recruitment/Completion Rates

Graduating students are satisfied with their experience at UFV and the majority indicated that they would choose UFV again if the opportunity presented itself. The completion rate for History majors is reasonable as is the completion rate for courses. However, enrolment and recruitment is dropping overall (though enrollments rose for Fall 2012) and there is a lower fill-rate in the History program than in some other University programs. Most importantly, the Committee advised that the department identify the strengths and unique opportunities of History at UFV by offering a different kind of university program, not merely a smaller version of traditional programs at larger universities.

Recommendation 1: create courses aimed at non majors with enticing thematic topics.

Action: see A4.

Recommendation 2: do more to encourage departments to consider History courses as mandatory in their programs.

Action: the department is actively involved in the BA Review and is promoting Historical Consciousness as a breadth requirement in the BA.

Recommendation 3: ensure students declare their major earlier.

Action: students are now required to declare their major earlier.

Recommendation 4: make all courses the same number of credits to help rationalize the program.

Action: the suggestion of making all courses the same number of credits to help rationalize the program is an issue that will have to be addressed at the faculty level as it has budget implications; this recommendation was also made by the English Review Committee.

Recommendation 5: conduct an audit of when specific courses are offered.

Action: the Head completed a 5 year audit and is assured that there is sufficient variation in the department's timetabling.

Recommendation 6: examine the sustainability of upper level offerings given that the enrollment drop is largest at the 3rd year level and that fill rates at the 400 level are less than 50% overall.

Action: the Head has drawn statistics on every History course offered and its enrolment over the past 5 years; courses that consistently fail to fill at an acceptable rate will be culled or revised; popular courses will be offered more often to meet student demand; the Head will review the balance between third- and fourth-year courses in the timetable and explore the idea of an overall decrease in upper-level courses.

Recommendation 7: examine why summer session enrollments are declining.

Action: Summer session enrollments are not declining in the regular History offerings. Enrolment data is skewed by the low numbers of students enrolled in the Certificate on Indigenous Maps, Films, Rights and Land claims.

Recommendation 8: make advising mandatory at certain points in a student's program.

Action: see B12 above.

Recommendation 9: create concentrations to help students find courses that are interesting and suited to them, thus ensuring high completion rates.

Action: the department will not develop concentrations but will highlight thematic clusters within its program and will place this information on the web.

Recommendation 10: provide activities that contribute to a sense of community for students.

Action: see B2 above.

Recommendation 11: conduct exit surveys of students who drop early on in the semester.

Action: The viability of conducting exit surveys of students who drop early on in the semester will be explored with IR.

D. Faculty

The Committee noted that if the curriculum is streamlined, the need for additional faculty members would not be an issue. The department has a strong full-time/part-time ratio. The Committee noted that the workload is reasonable to support a fair research program but that research is not conducted equally and that the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is not pursued by many despite UFV's teaching mandate. The Committee suggested the following as a standard for research/scholarship: one monograph or two scholarly peer reviewed articles, as well as a number of additional activities such as conference presentations every five years.

Recommendation 1: criteria for performance review , and possibly rank and tenure, need to be developed as the amount of research currently being undertaken varies a great deal and workloads are not adjusted to reflect this (beyond the possible reduction of one course).

Action: the College of Arts is in the process of establishing a College Standards Committee to establish College-wide criteria for rank criteria, which will in turn inform performance review; the department has recently completed a summary of baseline expectations in each of these areas.

Recommendation 2: the message that research is an expected part of faculty responsibilities needs to be more clearly communicated/stressed.

Action: all faculty are aware that research and service are required components of their contract; the Associate Dean of Faculty meets with each department member on a three year basis to discuss their plans, accomplishments and challenges; the department is correct in its response that there was insufficient acknowledgement of the range of service and scholarship activities by the Committee.

Recommendation 3: address confusion surrounding available resources.

Action: a new faculty guidebook has been produced to redress possible confusion surrounding available resources and PD opportunities.

Recommendation 4: encourage some faculty members to get more involved in service opportunities in the profession.

Action: see above.

Recommendation 5: organize formal orientation session for sessionals and provide a faculty guidebook; the Head to e-mail PD opportunities to part-time members on a regular basis; ideally, part-time instructors need dedicated office space, access to computers, etc.

Action: see above; the university is currently experiencing a serious shortage of space; there are no additional spaces that can be dedicated to part-time faculty; full-time faculty members do not use their offices at all times so the department is encouraged to make arrangements to maximize use of office space.

Recommendation 6: UFV, being a teaching focused institution, needs to conduct regular and thorough peer teaching evaluations; this process would be more effective if student evaluations could be viewed by the Head and/or the part-time hiring committee; the Review Committee was taken aback that this was not already the case as this is the norm at post-secondary institutions.

Action: the Dean is in agreement with the Committee's recommendation; this issue is one to be negotiated with the FSA.

Recommendation 7: begin work on a hiring plan as it appears that there may be a lack of part-time faculty to replace faculty members on sabbaticals.

Action: the department has developed a hiring plan.

E. Resources

The Review Committee was impressed with the library and writing resources available on campus.

Recommendation 1: consider whether the growing reliance on e-books is sustainable.

Action: the department has made these recommendations to the Library Advisory Committee.

Recommendation 2: consider library skills workshops as mandatory.

Action: mandatory inclusion would lead to repetition; the department will consider setting up voluntary sessions for History students.

Recommendation 3: provide a dedicated space for sessionals.

Action: See D5 above.

Recommendation 4: provide a large private office for the Head and a more welcoming office for department Assistant.

Action: signage has been provided to designate the office of Head and Assistant.

F. Alignment with University and Community Needs/Plans

The strong emphasis on teaching in the History Department is in keeping with the first goal of the Strategic Plan, which is to provide the best undergraduate education in Canada. Department work with the community fits well with the second goal of the Strategic Plan which is to be a leader of social, cultural, economic and environmentally-responsible development in the Fraser Valley. The History Department has created strong partnerships with a variety of external stakeholders including the Stó:lō community and various local groups. Courses in BC History, Stó:lō, Mennonite, Sikh, etc. address this goal of the plan.

The Review Committee applauded these partnerships and encouraged the department to find ways to interact even more with external stakeholders and community groups. The department engaged well with the review process, in keeping with goal #3 of the Strategic Plan, which references being accountable in achieving our goals.

Recommendation 1: give serious thought and discussion to updating some of the curriculum/pedagogies if the UFV History Department plans to be the best undergraduate department in Canada.

Action: the Head will attend PD events and will engage the department in a full review and updating of the curriculum and pedagogies.

Recommendation 2: seek out additional partnership opportunities (internal and external).

Action: the department already partners with: Mennonite Studies; Peace Studies; Indigenous Studies; Early Modern Studies; in addition, department members work with local archives and historical societies already.

Recommendation 3: provide more research or experiential learning opportunities for students.

Action: the department has been proactive in addressing these concerns, increasing its co-op options and inclusion of skills-based learning outcomes.

Recommendation 4: improve evaluation of teaching, especially for new/part time faculty.

Action: see D6 above.

Recommendation 5: introduce peer evaluation of teaching.

Action: see D6 above.

Recommendation 6: encourage faculty members to get involved in service external to the University and in the profession.

Action: the department is very active in service as outlined in Program Self-Study; this is also highlighted in the members' CVs.

Recommendation 7: ensure a department member attends the yearly Chair meeting at the Canadian Historical Association.

Action: the Head will attend CHA Chairs Meetings.

Recommendation 8: create an activity to replace the *Historica Fair*.

Action: the *Historica Fair* will be replaced by "History in 5", a historical film competition with 2 parts: the first part geared towards UFV History students and the second part geared towards high school students (grades 10 and up).

Recommendation 9: enhance the external recognition of the History Department at UFV.

Action: enhancing external recognition is ongoing; the Head attends Articulation meetings annually and maintains contact with other department heads; the department has established relationships with Mount Royal and Grant MacEwan and talks are underway for a joint meeting between the teaching intensive institutions in BC and those in Alberta; department members do apply for external funding and collaborate with faculty at other institutions (including the University of Edinburgh, the University of Waterloo, the University of Chicago).

G. Program/Department Administration

The outgoing Department Head received positive reviews by full and part-time faculty and students. The department has a strong working relationship with the Dean and other administrators. The level of support staff is adequate. The department is characterized by a strong commitment to collegiality.

Recommendation 1: consider the creation of formal faculty coordinator positions.

Action: the department will create a program and a curriculum committee as well as point-persons for areas of concern such as practica and applied skills, study abroad and International; the Dean will request updates on program committee formation and tasks.

Recommendation 2: transfer more responsibilities and authority to the Head level.

Action: see D6 above.

Recommendation 3: provide professional development opportunities aimed at Heads such the ability to attend CHERD or the Chair Leadership Academy.

Action: the University has provided heads training in the past but heads felt this training was not suited to pragmatic needs as these arose; the university has not resolved how best to train incoming heads; as the Deans budget permits, heads will be supported to attend CHERD or the Chair Leadership Academy.

Recommendation 4: consider inviting student representatives to department meetings.

Action: the president of the student association will attend department meetings.

Recommendation 5: ensure all members of the department have a voice.

Action: a respectful and critical exchange characterises department exchange; the Dean will work with the Head to ensure that she facilitates communication and the sharing of all department members' perspectives.

The History Department has already implemented a number of recommendations. The Dean will work with the Head to address remaining issues and to report on progress both six months and one year from the date of this submission.