

November 24, 2014

East Carolina University

Department of History

Unit Academic Program Review

Response to Review Committee Recommendations.

On March 2, 3 and 4, 2014, the Department of History was visited by three reviewers: Chester Pach, Ohio University (Review Committee Chair); Kenneth Lipartito, Florida International University; and Charles Ewen, Department of Anthropology, East Carolina University.

On April 1 the Review Committee submitted a report listing eight "Program Strengths" and thirteen "Areas for Improvement/ Recommendations for Improvement" (hereinafter "Recommendations"):

Program Strengths

- Diversity of Teaching and Research Expertise
- Faculty Research Productivity and Grant Funding
- Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching
- Distinctive Identity from Maritime Studies and Atlantic World Programs
- Study Abroad
- Successful Outreach
- [Administrative] Staff
- Department Leadership

Areas for Improvement/Recommendations for Improvement

- Low Faculty/Staff Morale Arising from Budget Cuts and Lack of Raises
- Fixed-Term Faculty Having Little Advance Notice of Appointment/Providing Greater Advance Notice of Appointment
- Declining Resources for History Department Operating Budget
- Raise Efficiency of Introductory Teaching By Offering Larger Courses
- Too Many History Classes Satisfying Foundations Social Sciences Credit/Reduce Number
- Too Many Low-Enrollment Courses/ Devise New Courses and Increase Attractiveness of Existing Courses
- Need to Increase Enrollments in History Courses and Attract Majors/Consider Creation of Certificate Programs
- Continue to Experiment with Distance Education Courses
- Lack of Specificity in Policy for Tenure/Potential Revision
- Consider Changing the Current Teaching Load of Tenure-Track Faculty in Order to Improve Research Productivity

- Continued Efforts to Diversify Department Faculty
- Improved Communication with Staff Administrators
- Improved Departmental Strategic Planning

This response will specifically address each of the Recommendations, and will incidentally refer to the “Program Strengths” where relevant to the department’s responses. The Strengths and Recommendations were both given as bulleted, unnumbered lists, and are presented here in the same order in which they given by the Review Committee.

Low Faculty/Staff Morale Arising from Budget Cuts and Lack of Raises

RESPONSE: Budget cuts and lack of raises are obviously beyond the control of the department, but faculty and staff do not work for money alone (unless they have made a very poor career choice). Most history faculty find teaching and researching inherently rewarding, in part because we are aware of the vital contribution we are making to society by developing good citizens and by deepening humanity’s knowledge of its past.

For that reason, few things have been as damaging to faculty morale over the past five years as the realization that some high-ranked ECU administrators did not recognize the importance or value of History as a discipline. The Program Prioritization Committee, in the nine-cell matrices that it used to rank departments against one another, gave History our lowest score in the category of social importance. We could understand when poorly educated or short-sighted politicians expressed contempt for the liberal arts, but the realization that members of our own academic leadership shared the view that History was not important to modern society was truly dispiriting. It led to a sense that no level of performance could make any impression on decision-makers who had no regard for what we did. The juxtaposition of Chancellor Ballard’s 2010 State of the University Address, in which he recognized the Department of History as one of twelve “centers of excellence” at ECU, and the PPC’s determination that History should be reduced at ECU, was stark.

Fortunately, the course of time has led to changes in leadership that promise to end the debilitating hostility toward History and other liberal arts disciplines on campus, and replace it with a shared spirit of cooperation and mutual determination to succeed . This has already brought some relief, in the sense that we are no longer fighting an uphill battle just to have our work acknowledged as meaningful.

Beyond this, the department will increase its efforts to raise its own morale. We agree with the Review Committee’s recommendation that administrators should at least express appreciation of the efforts of faculty, since such appreciation costs nothing. Napoleon said of the cheap military medals that he gave his troops, “it is with such baubles that men are led”; he understood that recognition matters as much or more than materials rewards to many people. Within the department, for example, we are following the suggestion of Dean Downs of HCAS that the department do more to publicize its members’ book publications. For another example, the History Department now regularly sends to the HCAS Director of

Marketing and Communications notice of its members' accomplishments and outreach efforts. We will continue to look for non-material ways to recognize what we do—but raises would help too.

Fixed-Term Faculty Having Little Advance Notice of Appointment/Providing Greater Advance Notice of Appointment

RESPONSE: This is another problem, widely recognized on campus, that is beyond the reach of the department to solve. Our Personnel Committee usually votes to approve Fall faculty no later than March, but if the legislature doesn't pass a budget until July, the department doesn't find out if it can hire fixed term faculty until August. Holding the fixed term faculty in suspense this way every year is cruel and unacceptable. The elimination of multi-year contracts has made the problem universal for all fixed-term faculty. The History Department acknowledges that this is serious problem and urges the administration to develop some way of reducing the intolerable stress this system places on fixed term faculty.

Declining Resources for History Department Operating Budget

RESPONSE: As with the previous two recommendations, the History Department agrees with the Review Committee that this is a problem, and notes that we can do nothing to solve the problem itself. We do not anticipate that the operating budget will return any time soon to its 2007-8 level, from which it has been cut 45%. Since we cannot expect restoration of operating funds, the department is looking to increase its external funding to replace lost operating dollars, especially for faculty research travel.

This is a cultural change for History faculty, since the low costs of History research traditionally have not been supported by external funding. Up to now, few of us have taken the time to go through the dozens of email notices we receive each week about grant opportunities, since the overwhelming majority of them are aimed at other disciplines, usually in the natural sciences. To help us find ones we can use, the Research & Publication Committee is assuming responsibility for reading all of them, combing out the small percentage for which historical research projects are eligible, and communicating them to the department.

We are also looking to make more creative use of various small Foundation funds that have been set up over the years, but have been dormant. Most of them became inaccessible to us after the stock market decline in 2008, but now many of them have funds that can be used for some research and professional development purposes. We are looking at ways both to use the expendable portions of these funds and to encourage donations to them so that they are not quickly consumed.

Raise Efficiency of Introductory Teaching By Offering Larger Courses

RESPONSE: We began a pilot program in Fall 2014 to do this. Initially we offered two of our four introductory courses (1051 and 1031) in a large lecture/small recitation format, while keeping the other two (1050 and 1030) in the traditional 48-seat classroom format. This allowed us to reduce the number of temporary instructors hired. Enrolment was strong in 1051, which drew xxx students, but was disappointing in 1031.

We are continuing the program in Spring 2015, this time with HIST 1051 and HIST 1050. Initial registration indicates that 1051 will be even more successful, but 1050 will do no better than 1031 did. We intend to continue to experiment to find ways to teach 1000-level courses in larger formats.

Too Many History Classes Satisfying Foundations Social Sciences Credit/Reduce Number

RESPONSE: Currently most undergraduate History courses carry Foundations credit for Social Science. This includes not just the four introductory 1000-level courses and the few 2000-level courses but also dozens of 3000-level courses and some at the 4000 level. To determine if removing Foundations credit from 3000-level classes will reduce History enrollment significantly, we will survey students in this semester's classes to determine how are taking 3000-level History primarily to get Foundations credit. An informal survey several years suggested that most students in those classes are majoring in History or History Education, or taking the class for some reason other than Foundations credit. Assuming this is the case, we will consider the removal of Foundations credit from 4000-level and selected 3000-level classes.

Too Many Low-Enrollment Courses/ Devise New Courses and Increase Attractiveness of Existing Courses

RESPONSE: Low enrollment in certain courses is an acknowledged problem. In the past five years the department has addressed this by moving from a faculty-centered scheduling process to one driven primarily by student demand. The number of students taught each semester by each instructor is publicly circulated in the department (as part of the process for determining the allocation of graduate assistants), creating an incentive for instructors advertise their classes and increase enrollments. The total number of courses offered was reduced by 10% in Fall 2014, and reduced again in Spring 2015. Reducing the number of courses offered, however, also has the negative effect of making the program less attractive and increasing time to graduation, so it cannot be the only solution.

To make History more attractive to non-majors, we have revived two popular 2000-level courses on the history of sports and American business history, and we are soliciting proposals for new 2000-level courses (which would carry Foundations credit) in other broad, popular topics, for example. Histories of Medicine, Histories of Crime, or Histories of Sex, that will be aimed at non-History majors. These will be "topics" courses, as opposed to surveys, that could be taught by many different faculty; the Histories of

Crime course, for example, could focus on Jack the Ripper and crime in the cities of the Industrial Revolution when taught by a British history specialist, or smuggling and piracy if taught by a colonial historian, and so on.

Need to Increase Enrollments in History Courses and Attract Majors/Consider Creation of Certificate Programs

RESPONSE: For at least the past five years the recruitment of majors has been a priority of the Department, in particular the Director of UG studies and the UG committee. The number of majors has increased substantially over this time, but these efforts need to continue.

Specific initiatives include:

- Reduction of the History BA from 126 to 120 hours, bringing it in line with most other degrees on campus.
- Identifying other programs on campus whose students can double major in History without an excessive number of credits.
- Closer cooperation with Undergraduate Admissions, especially in connection with History Day, to increase the number of students who come to ECU intending to major in History.
- Increased participation in Open House.
- Direct meetings with advisors in other schools and colleges across campus, to educate them on the value and accessibility of History courses.
- Revision of the History minor to simplify and remove structural barriers.

Continue to Experiment with Distance Education Courses

RESPONSE: We are continuing to do so. DE offerings continue to increase each semester; as data accumulates we are learning which courses draw well in a DE format and which do not. Additionally, an ad hoc committee of the Department is developing recommendations concerning policies and procedures that DE affects (or that affect DE). The committee will report to the Department this year, with deliberations and actions to follow.

Lack of Specificity in Policy for Tenure/Potential Revision

RESPONSE: This issue was addressed in the revision of the unit code, approved by the Faculty Senate and Chancellor this semester. The new code follows the requirement to take scholarship of engagement into account, and recognizes the changing nature of publication (e.g. the growth of digital humanities) as well as the interdisciplinary nature of the Department and its Maritime Studies program.

Consider Changing the Current Teaching Load of Tenure-Track Faculty in Order to Improve Research Productivity

RESPONSE: The teaching load of the Department, as a whole, is 3/2, conforming to the UNC system's expectations for ECU. The teaching load for tenure-track faculty has been 2/2, with the additional course made up by other faculty. This has been sustainable while the number of tenure-track faculty has been low (currently two out of 29 full time faculty). All tenure-track who have applied in the past ten years, and possibly longer, have been awarded tenure, suggesting that their productivity has been satisfactory. It is not clear that there has been a problem in terms of productivity, nor is it evident that decreasing the teaching load of tenure-track faculty further (at the expense of tenured faculty) would not create additional problems of faculty morale and productivity among the tenured faculty. The department does not agree with this recommendation.

Continued Efforts to Diversify Department Faculty

RESPONSE: The department acknowledges that two decades ago almost all History professors were white males, and that after hiring more or less evenly by gender for at least the past twelve years, white men are still the large majority. At the current pace of hiring, it would be many more years before the historical imbalance disappears, even if the department hired only women.

Given these circumstances, the department will remain committed to the value of diversity, not just in racial or sexual identity but in every characteristic that makes individuals unique: political ideology, religion, age, area of study, national and regional origin, and many others. The only area in which we will actively seek uniformity is in excellence of qualifications to teach and research History.

Further, given the legacy of underrepresentation of women and racial minorities in the department which we cannot quickly change, we remain committed to the principle treating one another as fellow professionals, and treating all of our students fairly and without regard to identity. .

Improved Communication with Staff Administrators

RESPONSE: Faculty have a human tendency to make last-minute requests of the staff. Some faculty expect services that are no longer provided due to changing technology, budget cuts, or both. When faculty fail to communicate their needs and expectations to the staff clearly and in time, tension results, especially because the asymmetry of status can make staff reluctant to press on this issue.

Department leadership will make an ongoing effort to remind faculty of the importance of clear communication, timely submission of requests, and common courtesy when dealing with the office administrative staff.

Improved Departmental Strategic Planning

RESPONSE: Since the sudden downturn in state support for higher education in 2008 and the resulting cuts to ECU and its departments, the History Department has found itself reacting to events, and even defending the basic importance of History and other liberal arts disciplines, instead of planning for the future. As stated at the beginning of this response, we are now looking forward to a new era of cooperation and mutual appreciation among the component schools and colleges of ECU. In 2014-15, the department will take advantage of a planned change in leadership to use the outgoing chair's five-year review process as an opportunity to take stock of the recent past and to articulate a vision for the future.

Historically, the department has viewed strategic planning with a jaundiced eye. The overall mission of the department can be defined in three words: teaching, research, service; just as the university's mission can be summarized in its one-word motto, *Servire*. Too many times in the past, when the university has requested "strategic" plans to implement this admirably succinct mission, it has actually come up with operational plans that feature excessive levels of detail and are quickly rendered obsolete by events.

This, in contrast, is an appropriate time for the Department to engage in true strategic planning, in the sense of discussing what we want the Department (and the profession of History as a whole) to look like in ten to fifteen years, and what we need to do get the Department there. The next chair of the Department will have the opportunity to pursue this initiative.