



Department of History

Dr. Jasamin Rostam-Kolayi, Professor and Chair

PROGRAM PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Department of History's Response to the External Review Team's Report

April 13, 2020

On January 31, 2020, the Department of History submitted a self-study to the Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (Sheryl Fontaine), the H&SS Associate Dean (Jessica Stern), and the History Program Performance Review External Team (Dr. David Iglar, Professor, Department of History, UC Irvine; Dr. Caitlin Murdock, Professor, Department of History, Cal State Long Beach; and Dr. Eileen Walsh, Professor and Chair, Department of Sociology, Cal State Fullerton). It was our pleasure to host the external review team's visit. On March 2, 2020, the team met with History faculty, students, staff, and the Chair, as well as the H&SS Dean and Associate Dean. The team submitted its report on March 12, 2020 just as the COVID-19 crisis hit the American consciousness and Cal State Fullerton and other university campuses nationwide began to take measures to protect students, faculty, staff, and employees. Thus, the Department's response was produced amidst the physical closure of the campus and the university's abrupt transition to remote instruction and administration. We thank the Dean's Office for revising the PPR timeline to accommodate these current challenges.

We are pleased that the External Team found the History faculty to be “committed scholar/teachers who are actively working for the long-term success of the Department with good humor and resilience despite significant institutional setbacks” (report, p. 1). Indeed, the qualitative and quantitative evidence available in the report and its appendices confirms that the Department is a place of excellent and innovative teaching, outstanding and internationally recognized scholarship, as well as extensive and dedicated service to the profession, university, college and community. In addition to its praise, the report offers concrete suggestions and recommendations in four key areas: 1) Curriculum; 2) Advising, Retention, and Graduation; 3) Recruitment; and 4) Priorities and Long-Term Plans.

The response below—produced by Chair Jasamin Rostam-Kolayi, Vice Chairs Lisa Tran and Volker Janssen, and the Department Strategic Planning Committee (Drs. Ben Cawthra, Nancy Fitch, and Aitana Guia)—was presented to History faculty members at a department meeting on April 10, 2020. Their feedback was also incorporated in the response below, which addresses the four areas of the External Review Team's report.



Curriculum

The External Team acknowledges the considerable setbacks facing the Department prompted in AY 2017-18 by the CSU Chancellor's Executive Order 1100, which eliminated HIST 110A and 110B as required General Education courses for all CSUF undergraduates. This development changed the Department's Full-Time Equivalent Students (FTES), its budget allocation, and its relations with lecturer faculty. Since 2018, the Department has initiated efforts, still on-going, to update and revise its curriculum.

One of our first responses involved designing 200- and 300-level courses destined for General Education. With the support of Dean Fontaine and the Provost's Office, faculty members who launched new course proposals on Curriculog were awarded a stipend in Spring 2019. A total of 10 new course proposals were submitted, and to-date the University General Education Committee has approved four of them (HIST 200—"Ideas, Books, and Beliefs: Texts that Changed History," HIST 210A—"Baseball History," HIST 230—"Clashing Steel: Classic and Medieval War and Society," and HIST 231—"Roar of Cannons: Modern War and Society"). At the April 10, 2020 faculty meeting, the Department voted to approve 3 units of CSUF 200-level History courses to be counted toward the lower-division requirements for the History major. Approved 200-level courses will be listed on the green and yellow sheets used for advising. Thus, the Department has decided on a place within the major for some of our newest courses.

On the thornier and more complicated question of revising the structure of the History minor and major, a March 2019 department retreat made progress on this front. One positive outcome was the successful launch and approval of an updated Minor in History operational in Fall 2020. As for revision of the major, the Department discussed four proposals at the March 2019 meeting. Though consensus around any single option was not achieved, the retreat did raise several issues we agreed to place on the agenda for future discussion, such as adding a required applied history course (i.e. public, oral, digital, community, internship, editing) and/or a required two-semester senior research seminar (HIST 489T/490T) to the Major in History.

The External Team noted the need for a clear menu of course offerings, so that students can anticipate how frequently courses will be scheduled in a two-year period. Scheduling, even one year in advance, is a challenge given sabbaticals and other types of faculty leave and course releases. The Department's rich and varied upper-division course offerings reflect our scholarship and our commitment as teaching scholars. In AY 2018-19 the Department's Curriculum Committee drafted a version of our green sheet (the list of upper-division history courses and their categorization into required geographical areas) that better guides students on the frequency of course offerings (i.e. every semester, once a year, every other year, etc.). Its circulation was put on hold until the ten new course proposals were approved, the placement of the 200s in the major/minor was decided, and the dust of course retirements settled. A revised green sheet that acts as a guide, and not just a list of courses, and major advising attuned to communicating course frequency to undergraduate and graduate students we hope will address this student concern.



Perhaps the most useful curricular recommendation in the External Team's report was to urge the Department to rethink the approach to its core courses and review the learning objectives, in particular, for HIST 300A and 300B. We put this item high on our list of priorities by assembling a Fall 2020 Ad-Hoc Committee on HIST 300A/300B made up of instructors who regularly teach these courses. We also appreciate the team laying out a collaborative and inclusive process for achieving consensus on the content and skills of our core courses.

Advising, Retention, and Graduation

The External Team's evaluation here addresses useful points pertaining to both our undergraduate and graduate programs. As a way to boost advising and, therefore, increase retention and graduation rates, the report suggests the following: require advising through registration holds, track HIST 300A students to verify they are being advised, and/or use more bureaucratic advising opportunities as a way to do deeper advising on interests, goals, and/or barriers to progress.

Given the Department's recent move to an all-faculty advising model, we appreciate the team's attention to the perennial question of how to make advising accessible and attractive to students, an issue we grappled with even when we had two designated faculty undergraduate advisors. Though the 2018-19 History Retention Plan set a goal to offer advising information and resources in HIST 300A sections, the Department does not currently track those students to confirm they are following up with their advisor in later semesters. We do currently work on the assumption that a bureaucratic advising question is an opportunity to capture the whole student and their broader goals and needs. Furthermore, though the Department has discussed in passing the option of placing registration holds on student records as a requirement of seeing an advisor, we prefer to experiment with less punitive methods first.

We agree with the team's recommendation to use our cohort sections (HIST 110A, 110B, and 300A) as the first advising touch-point and a way to increase retention and graduation outcomes. We also re-commit ourselves to introducing advising in HIST 300A (one of the first courses taken by our Transfer students), while considering a way to track this cohort after the semester ends as a good way to ensure our majors continue to receive advising information. Moreover, the Department will consider extending the HIST 300A cohort experience to HIST 300B to retain continuity for First-Year Transfer students.

The External Team offered suggestions on revising practices and policies in the Department's M.A. program, which has been a popular destination for our B.A. alumni and for secondary teachers seeking intellectual growth and professional promotion. Long-standing practice has been to maintain strong admissions and enrollments. Though the current number of M.A. students cited in the External Team's report as 180 is inflated, our graduate program is still a healthy size at 129. We also acknowledge that a number of the 129 are unsupervised students on GS 700 units. Instead of reducing M.A. admissions, we aim to offer students robust advising and support throughout their graduate experience. To that end, the Department has allocated two fourth courses to faculty members who are available weekly to meet with M.A. students in person and via email or telephone to broadly



advise. Their advising activity entails creating study plans, finding ways to meet students' intellectual and professional goals, and offering mentorship that includes counsel on everything from emotional, financial, and academic matters. This also encompasses advising on internships, career preparation, and professional development. Beyond this, the advisors are also involved in the graduate program in terms of recruitment, admissions, orientation, and curricular developments. They form, along with the graduate coordinator, an informal committee that meets during the semester to keep the program running smoothly. In addition, this year a History faculty member, who receives a stipend from a SOAR-sponsored grant, is offering one-on-one guidance and group support for graduate students completing theses, projects, and exams and building a cohort and community to motivate students to completion. The Department may consider making this culminating cohort experience an M.A. requirement.

A final recommendation to establish a more clear division of labor and responsibilities between the graduate coordinator, who is an administrative staff member, and the M.A. faculty advisors is worth the Department's consideration. Long-standing Department practice has been to rely on a History staff member to oversee the bureaucratic and technical duties of the M.A. program. The graduate program coordinator's responsibilities include explaining to students the fundamentals of the study plan in preparation to meet with their faculty advisor, whereas the faculty advisors' main duties are to recommend coursework as well as the full range of duties detailed above. In response to the team's report, the graduate advisors will review the division of administrative and advising responsibilities in the M.A. program as we move forward. The Department strives to raise the profile of our faculty advisors so that students use them as their primary resource.

Recruitment

Here the report offers strategies for recruitment of students that appear reasonable and useful. We will begin offering our new 200-level GE courses in AY 2020-21 and hope they prove to boost recruitment of new majors and minors. An initiative recommended by the External Team would be to identify groups of potential double majors and minors in other disciplines/programs to suggest major/minor pairings. In fact, our fourth course-supported Retention Coordinator started such an effort this year. The coordinator's work in AY 2020-21 will involve consulting with advising units in H&SS departments and outside the College (such as Cinema and Television Arts, Communication, etc.), as well the university's Academic Advisement Center, and share History major and minor publicity materials with them. Since the Department has already devoted a fourth course to Recruitment and Retention, we are in a position to carry out efforts suggested by the External Team.

This year we have prioritized the revamp of the Department website by devoting a faculty member's Fall 2019 fourth course activity to its re-design and new content, which was then handed over in Spring 2020 to a History administrative staff member with the requisite IT skills to input changes. Our long-anticipated updated website, which we expect to launch by the end of this semester, will better reflect the Department's teaching, scholarly, and service activities as well as the dynamism of its students and alumni.



Priorities and Long-Term Plans

The External Team acknowledged the value of the Department's priorities and long-term plans and emphasized "support from the University" as key to achieving them (report, p. 5). The team lamented the poor conditions on the 8th Floor of the Humanities Building and linked the Department's ability to recruit majors to improvements in the physical space occupied by the Department. In fact, within the past week, the Department's infrastructure has been further eroded due to prolonged rainstorms, which caused leaking and ceiling and wall damage in the Department's main office and hallway, the Chair's office and lounge, and perhaps in faculty offices. The team also spotlighted the Center for Oral and Public History (COPH), explaining that "any R-1 university in the country would enthusiastically welcome and support the COPH with a continuing operating budget and would utilize the Center for university publicity purposes" (report, p. 5). While the College has supported the build-out of the new Center, a modest operating budget would go a long way to guaranteeing that COPH's grants and fundraising be devoted entirely to student-centered projects and initiatives, rather than paying for operational expenses. We hope that the Department of History's infrastructural needs and an operating budget for COPH may one day become priorities for the university and College.

The team recognized the Department's forward-looking vision in its commitment to Digital History and noted that we should be "rewarded for [our] leadership" here. Thus, we do not want to lose sight of our dynamic Digital Humanities initiatives, workshops, and projects, enumerated in the PPR Self-Study, and our desire to secure greater university support in this domain. Resources for Digital Humanities would serve the College as whole and a larger pool of students beyond History majors.

Acknowledgements and Conclusion

The Chair wishes to thank the individuals and groups that were instrumental in History's 2019-20 Program Performance Review:

- The students who met with the External Review Team
- Dr. Kate Burlingham and her HIST 411B students who shared a class session with the team
- The Department's office staff
- The Department's Vice Chairs
- The Department's faculty members
- The members of the External Review Team
- The H&SS Dean and Associate Dean
- The CSUF Provost

It is an honor to serve as Chair of Cal State Fullerton's Department of History, a vibrant intellectual community of students, faculty, and alumni.