

HISTORY PROGRAM REVIEW  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO  
EXTERNAL CONSULTANT REPORT

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Visit of 30 November and 1 December 2006

Introduction

Overall, the History Department effectively fulfills its academic mission as a support for the University (notably by providing a wide array of General Education courses, which regularly fill to capacity) and in delivering its own major, minor, concentrations, and graduate programs. History Department members are extremely dedicated to their students, to their pedagogy, to their research, and to collegiality. The department hosts a number of programs which rely on a discrete number of courses that are recombined, emphasized or deemphasized according to the educational goal. Of fundamental concern, however, is the instability in the overall university budget. On November 11, 2006, the *Sacramento Bee* reported an immediate \$6.5 million cut in the annual university operating budget of \$233 million. After budget slashing began, this administrative directive was rescinded approximately two weeks later. Obviously, ramifications are ongoing and must be so until the institutional budget is stabilized.

Report

The department's success in meeting past recommendations is intertwined with specifics of academic programs and assessment, students and faculty, and institutional resources and support. These topics influence one another, so these sections intertwine, below. Major topics and responses to specific questions are in bold type, wherever possible.

The History Department has made some progress in addressing the recommendations from the 2000 program review. **One of its great strengths is advising** (addressed in recommendations 3, 4, and 11). **Undergraduates** meet with a First Contact Advisor who helps clarify students' interests and goals and then assigns each one to the faculty member with whom the student shares the greatest academic interest. Students in the Precredial Program have their own advisor who is very familiar with the ever-shifting requirements of teacher education. The department has prepared a pile of informative handouts on careers, a "roadmap" to the undergraduate major, GE courses, a GE and Graduation Requirements Worksheet, two sheets aimed at Pre-Credial

students, History FAQ's (in part, to aid the overworked staff) and an undergraduate major advising form.

At the **graduate level**, more focused programmatic options permit improved academic advising, and, more importantly, enhanced advising on future careers. The Standard Program is in the process of developing three options (two still in the proposal stage). The first, and most complete, is designed to assist the vast majority (roughly 80 to 90 per cent) of the students in the standard graduate program, and emphasizes community college teaching. The other two options address specialized work in the private or public sector and skills specifically for secondary school teachers. The first two also promote entry into a Ph.D. program. The Public History Program is a separate graduate program within the department which has not only achieved considerable success (measured by the employment record of its graduates) but by the development of a Ph.D. Program in conjunction with U.C. Santa Barbara.

In general, the structure of curricular and course offerings are in line with similar programs in the discipline. In certain areas, the CSUS **History Department excels in providing innovative and timely programs**, specifically in the **pre-credential program** and in the **standard master's program**, with its varied tracks. The **very successful M.A. in Public History** is unique, and the Ph.D. offered in conjunction with U.C. Santa Barbara is the only program of its type in the nation. All but one faculty participate in the delivery of graduate courses, and all serve as readers. **A complicated points system has allowed a very small measure of release time for thesis reading or directions, described by one professor as one class off in six years. When the faculty member who keeps track of these points retires, it is very strongly recommended that someone else take over this duty. Delivery of the department's fine graduate programs deserves this small measure of support.**

Some changes have **reflected particular sensitivity to certain recommendations in the 2000 program review**. To offer other opportunities for student involvement in history (recommendation 1), the department is planning to found a History Club in Spring 2007. Regarding World, rather than Western History (see recommendation 5), student preference for World History over Western is helping to shape departmental offerings. Required and recommended readings in the graduate historiography sequence (History 201 and 202) clearly include recent works (recommendation 12). The latter two shifts, in particular, respond to **major trends in the discipline**.

Under current circumstances, most **problematic** is recommendation 9, that the University at least triple its **support for faculty research efforts**. In the recent past, support has been forthcoming in very limited quantities. Consequently, the faculty has found a creative but exhausting solution to reducing their own teaching load from 4 to 3 courses a semester. Some faculty

elect to take large lecture sections of approximately 120 students, thereby gaining credit for two classes rather than one. **This step necessitates additional graders to assist the faculty.** This measure is very cost-effective since large sections may account for 2, 3, or sometimes 4 regular-sized sections, thus saving the cost of hiring part-time faculty. Additionally, **faculty thus earn time which can go to research, again with very little expense to the university.**

**To repeat, the history faculty is willing to teach additional large sections of key classes, in order to support the university's mission, as long as the university provides a sufficient number of graders.**

Implementation of this method requires **history access to large classrooms**, of which CSUS has a limited amount. It is therefore recommended that the History Department consider **adding sections of popular classes during afternoon slots, and/or on Fridays** to help alleviate the classroom crunch (perhaps advertised: "Students! Take courses when you can get parking!").

Despite this lack of sufficient support, **history professors are commended for their very high level of scholarly and creative activities**, which go well beyond the RTP requirements of the department and the university. These activities not only include numerous publications (including books) but also the organization of conferences, of museum exhibits, and other interactions with the local and scholarly community.

Not only has support for faculty research almost disappeared, **library allocations**, which are absolutely crucial to *student* success in history courses, have bottomed out. Obviously, student access to new information can come from various sources, but if faculty are hampered in their ability to attend conferences (where faculty can be privy to cutting-edge research which they can share with their students) and the library is inadequate to meet student needs (students have described it as "pathetic"), the history major **needs improved institutional support.**

Despite dissatisfaction with the scope of library holdings, **students are generally satisfied** with the education and attention they receive at CSUS, hence their high undergraduate retention rate and return to the graduate program. In general, they are able to access the courses they need to fulfill requirements, although their *preferred* courses may sometimes be scheduled at the same time, necessitating some hard choices. They are **delighted with the access they have to conferences with faculty**, and strongly commend faculty on remembering their names and family situations, even after a period as long as a decade. They most definitely feel socialized into the discipline of history and look forward to a variety of jobs either in the field or in which their history-based skills will be useful. At least one student has voluntarily attended the current

budget meetings, and he is doing a commendable job of keeping his peers informed as this difficult situation unfolds.

Both undergraduate and graduate students have been able to analyze their educational experience and communicate it with clarity and precision. **The History Department has attracted an outstanding cadre of students and is commended for instilling and/or enhancing qualities of inquiry and mature communication at all levels.**

At the most basic level of **individual courses, student and faculty performance are regularly assessed** in a systematic, regular fashion. Syllabi contain the catalog description and a list of goals and objectives for each course. The department should be commended on their clarity of expression which informs each student about the benefits to be derived from each course and the expectations for optimum student performance.

Regarding **faculty performance**, the department uses a standardized form to evaluate all part-timers' classes, all graduate seminars, and at least one course per semester for full-time faculty. As reflected by this form, teaching effectiveness is characterized by course organization; effective reading materials and instructional aids; active student-professor interchange in class; appropriate student assignments; professor availability outside of class; effective testing; fair grading; intellectual challenges, and professor's enthusiasm for the subject. This assessment method also contributes strongly to **maintaining consistency among multiple sections of a course.**

On the other hand, **program assessment** has been less systematic. It is therefore **recommended that the appropriate faculty meet with the University Assessment Coordinator** in the Academic Affairs Office to **develop or to streamline program assessment.** Interested participants are also referred to the book, *Assessing Academic Programs in Higher Education* by Mary J. Allen of the California Institute for Teaching and Learning (Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Co., Inc., 2004, ISBN 1-882982-67-3 or at [www.ankerpub.com](http://www.ankerpub.com)). A better understanding of assessment options and methods of implementation would go a long way toward reducing the view that assessment is a burden rather than a tool and would help to increase its implementation. The university is encouraged to provide **support for departmental self-assessment**, another area of faculty research, or self-study.

However, the department has been prompt in **using assessment tools** in the face of the aforementioned budget cut. Reflecting recommendation 10, that the department appoint an ad hoc committee on governance, the **department is commended for convening a Strategic Planning Committee in Spring 2006 to address ways and means for meeting department goals within the context of the college and the university.** At that time, the department Strategic Planning Committee took an immediate survey regarding the

advisability of expanding distance education with the possibility of mandating its use. The overwhelming student response was negative (a view reemphasized by students speaking directly to this consultant). The committee then recommended the status quo in which only interested professors teach appropriate courses to those students willing to take them, rather than implementing a possible distance-learning mandate.

The idea that **technology** provides a panacea to a wide arrange of woes needs careful consideration. For example, the implementation of CMS (Peoplesoft) has **increased the staff workload**, driven some experienced staff into retirement, and exacerbated problems of communication.

In other areas, the **staff make specific recommendations:**

1. that an additional staff member be hired to share the increased workload engendered not only by changing technology, but by growing departmental enrollments
2. that promotions be garnered without having to move around the campus
3. that a professional study of space utilization consider
  - materials storage, such as student files and location of the printer
  - ergonomics and the rapid replacement of worn-out furnituremovement of people throughout the office space without interrupting staff at work

While there is a good relationship between faculty and staff, it could be improved by continued acknowledgement of the heavy burdens staff bear, and an attempt to address the above concerns when practicable.

**Obviously, the department's success in attracting students should be balanced by a concurrent addition of faculty and staff.**

Recommendation 8, that the University authorize new hires to a complement of 18, was exceeded in 2003 with 21 full-time faculty, a number which has now dropped to 19. As hiring occurred, attention was paid to a need for faculty with "diverse" backgrounds, presuming age and gender as well as race and ethnicity were considered (recommendation 6). Despite meeting these 2000 goals, the recent downward trend in hiring is particularly problematic because **history enrollments have been increasing**. On the one hand, although the department is to be complemented for its **excellent recruitment and retention efforts**, this success has resulted in an **extremely high student/faculty ration of 30/1**.

The department is consequently suffering from a need to offer approximately **half of its courses through instruction by part-time faculty**. This practice has brought its own set of concerns.

- First, it creates **problems of continuity and pedagogical effectiveness**. It is difficult to maintain consistency when so many different people offer multiple sections of a course.

- Second, it creates **problems for students** who wish to know from whom they will be taking classes. In 2000, recommendation 7 stated that the department should list part-time instructors by name in the class schedule. This effort has been hampered by the impossibility of listing instructors' names until employment contracts are signed. With the looming, immediate budget cut, the only viable source of savings would be a reduction in the number of part-time faculty. Thus, listing names in the schedule is more problematic than ever.
- Third, it has **increased the burden on staff**. Students pester the staff for the names of instructors, which interrupts their work. Furthermore, part-timers do not have voicemail, so telephone messages have to go through staff. From all perspectives, **a reduction in the proportion of part-time instructors to full-time, tenured or tenure-track faculty is highly desirable.**

However, the part-timers are not entirely strangers in the History Department. The department produces an **award-winning newsletter** (ranked third in the nation in the 2006 Phi Alpha Theta competition), in which selected part-timers are featured. **All those involved are commended for their fine publication.**

The fact that **student enrollment has outpaced the hiring of faculty and staff has negatively impacted the department** in many ways. However, the History Department has been and **continues to be willing to aid in alleviating this pressure** through its own creative and collegial efforts. It is therefore **very strongly recommended that the department be given the autonomy** to juggle enrollments so that smaller classes at several levels (not just seminars) may be retained as long as FTEs and budgets are maintained for several reasons:

- **Students highly value the learning experience they get in smaller classes**, where professors know their names; they are able to discuss their own ideas with professors and peers, and can more thoroughly explore the material under study. These small classes greatly increase students' overall satisfaction with the program. They are therefore more willing to accept the larger sections because they know they will receive individual attention in selected classes. This awareness enhances student retention and helps build the graduate program in history (as several students attested from personal experience).
- **Smaller classes aid faculty research**, which is otherwise unsupported. Faculty can nurture new classes based on their own research to develop new offerings within the major (and often, within General Education). This nurturing process may take a couple of years but has the advantage of improving faculty morale and bringing more cutting edge material into departmental course offerings, helping to keep it current with regional and national trends.

- Staff have done their best to support the departmental faculty and students by such actions as “capturing” larger classrooms when they come open, communicating directly with students because there is not enough staff available for the upkeep of the department web site (where the students might go for course information – such as required textbooks – if someone could keep this current), and trying to answer who will teach which section when part-time jobs are in limbo.  
**Departmental autonomy in managing class enrollments, so long as FTEs and budgets are maintained, would help reduce these uncertainties and their concurrent pressures on overworked staff.**

**Educational effectiveness, particularly in light of budget uncertainties, remains a major consideration for history faculty.** Professors consistently spoke of attempts to improve pedagogy, enhance professional development, and perform effectively within the university without feeling abused rather than appreciated. **Relationships of the department within the college and the university need improvement,** but apparently most of the current friction is driven by budget uncertainties.

However, **the budget realities demand that the History Department find ways to refocus.** For example, it is very unlikely that all of the four or five professors retiring in the next few years will be replaced. The department therefore has to prioritize which classes it absolutely requires for its majors, minor, concentration, and graduate programs, and shape hiring accordingly.

It is therefore recommended that the Strategic Planning Committee, or another similar to it, formulate a number of options for future programmatic emphasis and hiring strategies to support them. The options could then be presented to the department as a whole for consideration and approval before being forwarded to the Dean, the Provost, and other interested parties. **At best, this process should be collaborative at all levels, based on common goals achieved through careful assessment.** For example, the department cannot deliver its programs without a professor of California history, a position which will be open in the near future. However, it should consider shaping a position which combines California history with some other emphasis, based on well-formulated, departmentally–approved priorities. This consultant cannot determine which other positions are absolutely essential, or which should be recombined with others for optimum program delivery. These very serious, far-reaching decisions are instead the responsibility of the department, college, and university, who, at best, should make a collaborative effort to address present and future needs.

**At the very least, making fundamental decisions such as these requires ongoing programmatic assessment regarding past successes, future needs, and budget realities (when they become established and clarified throughout the entire university community).**

**Given that many current difficulties may be of long duration, it is strongly recommended that enhanced communication become a greater priority to all involved.**

Appropriate mechanisms may well be in place, but other pressing matters should not be allowed to overshadow their timely and effective use. Every opportunity should be taken for useful communication and for commendations where appropriate.

### Summary

In summary, this report offers the following commendations for the History Department and makes the following recommendations for the History Department, the College, and the University:

Commendations for the History Department (in the order discussed in this report):

1. Advising at the undergraduate and graduate level.
2. Varied program options utilizing a finite number of courses, particularly at the graduate level.
3. Teaching large sections of key courses
4. A high level of faculty scholarship
5. Faculty willingness to conference with students
6. Ability to attract and retain a high caliber of students
7. Creation and utilization of a departmental Strategic Planning Committee
8. Ability to manage an extremely high student/faculty ration
9. An award-winning newsletter

Recommendations for the History Department (in the order discussed in this report):

1. Offer afternoon and Friday classes, particularly for the most popular courses