

## History

A department in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts offering the B.A., and offering the M.A., and Ph.D. through Five College cooperation.

### ■ The Review Process

This was a standard AQAD review. Reviewers were:

Altina Waller, chair (University of Connecticut)  
Patrick Manning (Northeastern University)  
Paul Mattingly (New York University)  
Marysa Navarro-Aranguren (Dartmouth College)  
Judith Smith (University of Massachusetts Boston)

### ■ Main Issues

The visiting team observed that the History department is “highly regarded and respected,” but also cautioned that it has “arrived at an important moment of change.” The department is much smaller than it was at its peak in the 1970s, and almost half the current faculty are approaching retirement. Yet, the department has not developed a clear plan for its future development and the team found campus administrators “understandably perplexed” about the department’s future direction.

To assist in building a clear and persuasive vision, the team made several specific recommendations:

- Build on its established reputation by identifying no more than three fields of excellence, and seek middle or senior-level appointments to bring “instant recognition” to the department.
- In selecting these fields, avoid attempting either to cover every specialty or to “merely extend and replicate” existing areas of emphasis. Rather, the team urged a “rethinking of departmental excellence” that would subject “traditional categories to fundamental reconsideration.”
- Aggressively recruit graduate students within these targeted areas.
- Ensure that the Public History program, which is a unique strength, is “integrated intellectually and administratively” into the department.
- Take advantage of another unique strength, the Five College Ph.D. program, by focusing UMass hiring on the three areas of strength, and use participating Five College faculty for support and coverage in secondary fields.

The undergraduate program was found to be strong and well received by students. Suggested improvements included greater emphasis on introducing students to current debates in the interpretation of history, and creation of majors-only sections of introductory courses to help create esprit de corps. The team also questioned the absence of closer relations between History and related programs such as Latin American Studies, Women’s Studies, and Afro-American Studies. The team expressed specific concern over the relationship between History and Education in the preparation of elementary and secondary teachers, and urged greater

clarity with respect to undergraduate requirements, stronger preparation in world history, and a review of the approach to U.S. history.

The graduate program was seen as “facing critical challenges” engendered both by ongoing reassessment within the historical profession itself and by more local issues related to field and course coverage resulting from ongoing financial constraint. Future vitality will be tied to the department’s successes in identifying the three fields of excellence into which graduate students would be recruited. While the team did not endorse any specific choice of fields, it did suggest several criteria that might help guide the internal debate. In addition, the team offered perspectives on several of the possible fields articulated in the department’s self-study:

- The traditional emphasis on Latin America might be broadened to include a more comprehensive focus on “rethinking the Americas.”
- The department’s stated interest in global history “might be postponed ... until further discussion of what the department means this area to include.”
- The strength of the Public History program has been demonstrated, but more attention should be devoted to articulating the intellectual contributions of this perspective.

■ **Results of the Review**

The department will work throughout AY 2003-04 to discuss these issues and develop a strategic plan, with a departmental retreat scheduled to begin this process. This effort will include rethinking of traditional areas of emphasis, especially in light of projected retirements of senior faculty. Other goals include achieving better articulation between M.A. and Ph.D. areas, especially in Public History, Women’s history and other emerging fields. The department is taking a fresh look at the entire undergraduate curriculum, and has already made plans for an upper-division/graduate course in global history appropriate for prospective secondary school teachers, to be offered for the first time in Fall 2004.