

## History

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

### ■ The Review Process

This was a standard AQAD review. Reviewers were:

Jean Soderlund, Chair (Lehigh University)

Herman Bennett (Graduate Center, City University of New York)

Marilyn Young (New York University)

### ■ Main Issues

The Visiting Team praised the History department in all areas of teaching, service, and scholarship, while identifying some areas for continued improvement. The reviewers commented on the Department's contribution to the educational mission of UMass through its teaching in both General Education courses as well its service to over 500 undergraduate majors, its "vibrant" graduate programs, the high level of participation of its faculty in service and outreach, and high level of scholarship both in terms of volume and quality.

The reviewers concurred with and reiterated some of the most important findings of the 2003 AQAD team, including the central message of the need for the Department to transcend its own "inherited reputation" in order to envision a future that better serves to enhance its national prominence and crucial role at the University as a "cornerstone of the Humanities." This included a call for critically evaluating its areas of emphasis, to move the Department more towards current trends in the field that are interdisciplinary, international, comparative, and de-centered from the West. This suggestion for a renewed departmental image and orientation would crosscut all areas of teaching, scholarship, and service. The Team noted that, especially in terms of relatively recent departmental hires, the Department has already begun to move in such a direction.

The reviewers offered a number of specific recommendations:

- Review the undergraduate curriculum to more closely align the program with recent trends in the field, in pedagogy, and to better prepare students for graduate school.
- Promote interdisciplinary and Five College scholarship and teaching through developing cross-listed courses (and receiving support from the administration in overcoming barriers), and giving greater recognition to the value of the work faculty already do in these areas.
- "Re-configure an inherited institutional culture," in a way that takes into account and expands upon the department's current (though relatively new) presence in cross-cutting areas of scholarship such as transnational history. Enlist this strategic new vision to argue for more faculty lines.

- Bolster the graduate program by promoting the Department's strengths to colleagues in departments across the nation and world; by seeking funding for higher TA stipends to recruit top students (While continuing TA funding at the M.A. level); and by streamlining graduate degree requirements for more efficient assessment purposes, ease of transition from the M.A. to Ph.D. program, and reduced faculty workload.
- Review the service and outreach commitments of faculty, ensure proportionate distribution between tenured and pre-tenure faculty, and consider reducing the number of faculty on the Personnel Committee from seven to five.

## ■ **Response to the Review**

The Department commented that it is already implementing some of the recommended changes to lead to curricular improvement at the undergraduate level. They also noted that they are ready to plan for the streamlining of the graduate programs even in the wake of the last six years' actions to revitalize them. The Department reiterated its commitment to service, characterizing the continued service burden as "still unresolved" and with little indication of plans to enact structural changes. The Department was cautiously positive about the potential to address the Visiting Team's recommendation on strategic rethinking, indicating a willingness to deliberate on this question through small group discussions during the 2010-11 year, which would be "only agreement in principle to a process, not a commitment to make specific changes," thus underscoring its culture of acting only from the basis of "strong consensus".

The Dean concurred with the Visiting Team's observations of the History department's record of both superior teaching and scholarship. While noting the team's understanding of the University's current budgetary constraints to support new faculty lines, the Dean also did report that the College has approved a tenure-track search for History for the 2010-11 year, with others potentially forthcoming in the next few years.

## ■ **Student Outcomes Assessment**

The History department has not yet developed a common set of student learning outcomes to be applied across the major and assessed. Developing such learning outcomes will be part of the ongoing review of the undergraduate program. In the interim, however, drawing from benchmarking data, certain areas for program improvement have been identified by the Department: advising, faculty concern for progress, access to classes, and overall ratings of instruction. The Department is also holding brown bag lunch talks for faculty in which they discuss the assessment of student learning.