

Internal Academic Review 2006-2007
Department of History
Internal Academic Review Committee Report to Senate

The IARC fully supports the Department and explores new ways to address the recommendations outlined in the Review Team Report.

Outcomes of the Internal Academic Review of the Department of History

Joint response submitted by the
Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science and the
Head of the Department of History

The Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science and the Chair of the Department of History welcome the very positive assessments of the Department of History's work by the IARC, and are happy to provide the following in response to specific points raised by the IARC.

Strategic Hiring Plan

We note that the department has already developed a long-term strategic hiring plan in line with the IAR Team's recommendation 'that the number of full-time tenure-track or tenured faculty members within the Department of History be increased...'. The Department has established priorities for three of the five positions needed to meet this recommendation: Modern Canadian History, African History, and Modern German History. The remaining two have been left unspecified.

IAR Team report and has thus been introduced at a very late stage in the IAR process. The Team report simply noted in the body of the text the 'divergence' of the department's doctoral program in this respect from other North American universities and stated that 'The faculty members provide strong rationale for this change [...], although some doctoral students expressed concern about the possible perceptions [our italics] of this new approach. In response, the Department points to the report of the external OCGS consultants (Weaver/Masfall 2007) on our Graduate programme. This presents a resounding endorsement of the way we do things: "... although there may have been a perception inside Queen's and in some other universities that the elimination of a written comprehensive examination was a dramatic shift, the changes in degree requirements have not in the slightest compromised the objectives of this PhD programme which are to stimulate original research and thought, promote breadth, and instil professional development. The replacement of a written comprehensive field exam by the requirement to prepare and orally defend a syllabi in the major and minor fields is a fine technique for self-directed learning." The Faculty and the Department notes that the IAR self-study and the Departmental OGS submission both emphasize that the Department does have field requirements even though it does not have comprehensive examinations and that the goal of breadth is central to the design of the PhD programme. We would add that recent placement figures for History graduates in academic positions suggest the change has had no negative impact on their marketability – quite the contrary – and we have been given absolutely no reason to believe that it has lessened their ability to 'teach broadly in the curriculum.' At the same time, research shows that the Department's alternative model to comprehensive examinations is, in fact, not quite as unusual among North American Universities as the wording of the Report may suggest.

Follow-up on these recommendations and issues will take place during the annual academic planning and budget process between the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science and the Vice-Principal (Academic).

Attachment:

Review Team Report

Internal Academic Review (IAR) Team Report
For
Department of History
February 2007

Team Membership

Mr. Randy Booth, School of Rehabilitation Therapy
Ms. Jennifer Foote, Biology Graduate Student
Dr. John Freeman, Faculty of Education
Dr. Gerhard Pratt, Geological Sciences & Geological Engineering
Dr. Joan Stevenson, School of Kinesiology and Health Studies (Chair)
Dr. Mark Walters, Faculty of Law

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Introduction to Report

During the period of the review process for History, the Internal Academic Review (IAR) team met on five occasions before and after the External Academic Review period and attended the majority of the sessions with the external reviewers on November 8th and 10th, 2006. In addition, the IAR sought additional information from the Department and asked specific additional questions of the external review team. Based on a review of the History Self Study Reports (Vol. I, II and III) and additional information gathered during the process, the following report identifies issues and suggestions relevant to the Department and a series of recommendations.

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scholarly development, sustain its senior members in their research and mentorship of graduate students, and expand its number of tenure and tenure-track faculty positions.

Although the Department has made some changes recently that will assist in meeting these challenges – for instance the move to a 20:2 teaching load, we suggest other initiatives to help the development of the younger faculty and decrease the demands on senior faculty. To mentor the younger faculty, the Department should consider increasing the number of departmental events (seminars, workshops, visitors, etc.) and interdisciplinary endeavours (e.g., participation in ‘humanities’ centres) that develop interaction and collaboration within the Department and the larger University community. Furthermore, Departmental seminars can help unite a department. For example, a required seminar for graduate students (and faculty) could create: better learning across areas of expertise; a forum for graduate students and faculty to introduce their topics; and a chance to host speakers from other departments.

One possible change would reduce the workload on all faculty members, most particularly the senior members. In terms of the appointments process, the Department presently considers applications for faculty positions through a departmental committee-of-the-whole. This is a cumbersome method of making decisions, and the Department may wish to consider moving to an appointments committee model. Under such a model, all members of the Department would be invited to attend candidate job talks, consult candidate application files and make written submissions to the appointments committee, but candidate interviews and the subsequent discussions and decisions about hiring would be conducted by the appointments committee in private.

Overall, though, continued growth and development of the Department rests on having more tenure and tenure-track positions. The Department may wish to consider, for example, whether it should continue to diversify or whether it should now consolidate particular areas as areas of research strength. It may also decide to move to a theme-based approach as areas of strength as suggested by the external reviewers. These decisions would be best taken in light of the Department's ongoing examination of its research priorities.

Undergraduate Program

In terms of student satisfaction, the undergraduate History students rank their academic experience as very high. In teaching evaluations and year exit polls, History courses

were 'hounded'. It was the only way students could get what they wanted; however, other students resented this approach and found it inequitable. Course offerings were another concern. The students felt that there was too much Canadian history, with not enough selection for other areas or cultures. They also indicated that numerous courses are listed in the calendar yet never taught. The external reviewers recommended that the Department consider a "breadth requirement" that it has a more global coverage."

The course numbering system used in History was confusing for students, external reviewers, and members of the Internal Academic Review committee. We agree with the external reviewers that the current numbering system may also prove difficult for others outside Queen's University to interpret, for example, graduate chairs in other universities. The faculty argued that this numbering system cannot be changed so that the first number of the course code represents the usual year in which the course is taken because of inadequacies in the University's computer system. To move to a revised numbering system, one possibility would be to change the letters representing History in advance of

continuity and more enthusiasm to the role thus help in initiating changes to the undergraduate offerings.

Equity

History has been improving in its proportion of individuals associated with minority groups. The Department is to be commended for its progress, and we encourage continued striving toward equity the next cycle as well.

Self Evaluation and Future Prospects

The History Department appears to be a strong department at Queen's. Their teaching is normally above the Queen's average and their research has maintained its strength, despite the rapid faculty renewal that has taken place. Overall, the department appears to have found ways to maintain their liberal arts approach and reach consensus on decisions so that they progress with ongoing and innovative change to their programs. Improvements are still possible in the next cycle. It would appear that the challenges to research and scholarship, the undergraduate programs, and resources can be addressed through the joint efforts of the History Department, the Faculty of Arts and Science, and the University.

Recommendations

We conclude with two recommendations representing what we feel are required. The previous text also presents suggestions representing possibilities that might well improve the Department.

1. That the number of full-time tenure-track or tenured faculty members within the Department of History be increased so that the Department is able to develop and deliver a diverse set of courses to undergraduate students without an over-reliance on non-tenure/tenure track faculty, meet the needs of its current and future graduate students, and consolidate developing strengths in research and scholarship. To justify these additional hirings, the Department must provide the Faculty of Arts and Science with a concrete plan of the positions needed to accomplish these objectives.
2. That the undergraduate program be thoroughly reviewed and analyzed by the Department in a similar fashion to what has already taken place with the graduate program. In particular, the course number, the current level of restriction of number of seminars to History majors, the admission criteria for individual courses, the course catalog reflecting actual course offerings, and the employment of non-tenure/tenure track faculty in the undergraduate program need to be seriously explored in a comprehensive manner.