Graduate Program Review
Department of History

Submitted to

The Texas Tech University Graduate School

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Review Committee:
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Report of the Internal Review Committee for the Graduate Program of the History Department:

Program Overview and Vision
Rating: Satisfactory

In the Program Overview section of the self-study, the Department of History provides more of a set of value statements than a coherent program overview and vision. As Dr. Glatfelter of Utah State indicates in his external review document, “It was not clear at all, especially from the interviews, that the department has a clear direction of its graduate program.” This may be due to the fact that the cultural climate of the department has been in a state of flux and change since the change in administrative leadership approximately three years ago. The committee heard repeatedly in the interviews with faculty and staff that they had no real opportunity to be involved and become invested in the self-study document, and that is evident in this area. As one faculty member stated, “[History] is not the most transparent department.” Further, the division between the military historians and the rest of the department is not mentioned anywhere in the self-study document, although the frictional division between those two factions was evidenced in several of the faculty and graduate student interviews. It is difficult to rate this program’s vision in relation to peer institutions’ since the committee did not have access to a body of comparative vision statements. It should be noted that page 42 as Appendix A directs the reader to a web address where the Strategic Plan can be found. It would have been useful to extract the plan and provide a hard copy in the self-study.

The frictions between certain faculty are adversely affecting the graduate program and the graduate students in particular. The committee has strong concerns about how the division between the military historians and other history faculty can be resolved without disenfranchising the graduate students in the program. It was clear from the graduate student comments that the rift that exists within the department is responsible for some graduate student attrition. While a proposal does exist that would hive off the Diplomatic and Military History arm of the department, the committee does not endorse that solution. Instead, the committee prefers to see a strategic reconciliation between the departmental factions. And importantly, a strong message needs to be sent to the entire faculty of the Department of History that intellectual disagreements between faculty cannot be allowed to create a hostile environment for graduate students.

Faculty Productivity
Rating: Good

The committee commends the faculty for its efforts at diversifying its profile in the areas of gender, range of experience, and for maintaining its admirable scholarship, teaching, and service record. However, faculty perceptions on the direction the curriculum should take differ.
Pertaining to gender and rank, the department now has 9 assistant professors (6 of whom are female), 8 associate professors (comprising 2 women), and 11 full professors (all of whom are males). The 2001 review committee report indicated a dominance of male senior faculty in the department. Therefore, the current department chair’s leadership in recruiting strong female junior faculty to foster gender balance deserves special commendation. However, the problem of a strong male gender bias at the rank of full professor remains to be addressed.

Regarding scholarship and service to the profession, senior faculty members have maintained their high visibility through publications, presentations, fellowships, and substantial national and international grants since the last review. Most junior faculty have also displayed strong evidence of local, regional, national, and international scholarship through publications, presentations and responsibilities in professional societies, grants, and international visiting fellowships. However, the self-report indicates that scholarship in the department is undertaken as a predominantly individual endeavor. Senior faculty and, perhaps, more so those the department chair refers to as “young associate professors” might want to occasionally redirect their commitment in this area through collaborative work with junior faculty. This will enhance the department’s faculty mentoring program and help mitigate some of the tensions existing in the department.

The committee further commends the department for its recent introduction of a 2/2 teaching workload, particularly since this has helped to reduce tensions related to perceived uneven distribution of students in courses between the Americanist and non-Americanist History faculty. However, another workload problem identified in the 2001 review report still needs to be addressed. The last report noted that a few senior faculty members with established research records take on a heavy graduate student committee workload. Although there is some evidence that more junior faculty have started to take on more such responsibilities, there is still room for improvement. The committee found that it is senior faculty teaching American History and Military History that have heavy thesis/dissertation loads, and further that the predominant reason students tend to gravitate toward such faculty is the availability of relevant and abundant archival records on the TTU campus for the students’ research. The committee is of the opinion that the department could achieve balance in this area in two ways: first, by funneling more master’s students’ interests toward diverse thesis topics not exclusive of European and World History and second, by encouraging doctoral students interested in American History to cultivate more varied perspectives by including one non-Americanist historian on their committees.

Another area of concern is the conflicting faculty perceptions on the curriculum focus, and thus on the nature of faculty specializations. While some faculty seek a globally diverse curriculum that will attract doctoral students toward specializations in World and European History and thus, they argue, make them more marketable in today’s volatile job market for History graduate students, other faculty members support a curriculum with a strong emphasis on areas of study that complement TTU’s geographical and historical environment, such as the U.S. West and Borderlands, U.S. Agricultural History,
Military History, Sport History, and Latin/Mexican American Studies. The committee sees merit in both views. It agrees that a more global curriculum will support the department’s goal of providing the best all-round education to, in particular, its master’s students. The services of faculty with specializations in World and European History are invaluable in the achievement of this goal. At the same time, the committee sees the wisdom in strengthening areas of the department’s curriculum that already have available supportive structures and resources on the TTU campus to enhance the doctoral program (e.g., TTU’s archival collection and the Vietnam Center).

**Quality and Quantity of Graduate Students and Graduates**

**Rating: Good**

The committee was impressed with efforts by the department to recruit and retain quality and diverse students and increase graduation rates. Those attempts include admitting fewer borderline applicants, setting up a fall semester orientation system, stepping up the frequency of advising sessions, and stricter monitoring of student progress to ensure timely graduation. Further efforts have been made to reduce work-related pressures on GPTIs and TAs by drastically reducing their class sizes and offering “writing fellowships” to GPTIs during their dissertation semesters to afford them more time to write. Furthermore, the committee commends the department for offering programs that, overall, prepare graduates for wide ranging career opportunities in public institutions and private industry (and for its plans to expand HIST 5101 into a series of workshops on CVs, job interviews, and letters of application).

However, the committee notes the following as pressing issues negatively impacting the quality and quantity of graduate students and graduates:

- Although there has been a significant gender balance in enrolment over the past six years, minority enrolment remains perennially low. The department chair is strongly encouraged to continue working with other faculty and interested university administrators to continue working with regional conferences and taking targeted recruitment trips to showcase TTU and the department’s programs to prospective minority applicants.

- Overall, less than 50% of graduates admitted into the master’s and doctoral programs actually enrolled over the past six years. In fact, there was a significant drop in enrolment in 2005 due to insufficient funding. Therefore, additional funds for granting assistantships and scholarships to strong applicants might help to alleviate the enrolment problem.

- The self-report indicates that the department sponsors annual graduate student conferences through the Phi Alpha Theta student organization. Although this is laudable, it is not clear how much carry-over effect the conferences have on student publications and creative activities. The department is strongly encouraged to institute graduate student annual research paper and/or poster conferences, preferably as joint presentations with junior faculty and the “young associate professors” and/or as an interdisciplinary collaborative venture with other graduate students on campus. Additionally, doctoral students could be encouraged to submit proposals for regional and national conferences. They will
need more funding from the graduate school for conference travel. Equally important, the department might want to encourage more doctoral students to apply for high profile national fellowships like the Gilder-Lehrman Institute of American History Fellowship. These will help raise the department’s national ranking and prestige and hence attract more strong candidates.

- Even though much improvement has been made in an effort to establish increased accountability and to erase subjectivity in decision making by the graduate advisor, as well as creation of a more transparent system, negative student (as well as faculty) perceptions regarding equitability of teaching assignments for graduate students and limited transparency and adequacy of communication from the administration persist. More effort in alleviating these negative perceptions can be made.

- Finally, although great strides have been made toward retaining and supporting GPTIs and TAs, continuing tensions call for creative ways of supporting the students.

**Curriculum and Programs of Study**

**Rating: Satisfactory**

The History Department is in the process of developing a Graduate Student Handbook analogous to the Faculty Handbook that was recently completed. This promises to standardize the procedures, guidelines, expectations, and responsibilities for the graduate students. The department is to be commended on this step towards the enhancement of the graduate program.

The committee has some directed concerns regarding the graduate history curriculum and program of study. On several occasions in the interviews that the committee conducted with faculty and students, there were concerns and complaints raised about research methods course and the historiography course (HIST 5304 & HIST 6301). From the comments that were provided by both faculty and graduate students it is evident that the graduate curriculum committee needs to review these courses and make changes where necessary. Dr. Glatfelter recommends that this action “... would be to streamline, perhaps even standardizing the methodology course.”

The faculty and graduate students also expressed frustration with the requirement of two languages for the PhD. There is no requirement that proficiency in the two languages be demonstrated before the qualifying exams and this results in some students not demonstrating competency until after the completion of the dissertation. There was also some concern over the equivalencies of the instruments used to measure language competency. As Dr. Glatfelter observes, “This could present a problem, if the Department continues to expand its offerings in non-Western fields.” While the committee finds it commendable that the department has rigorous standards for its doctoral students, the department might reconsider its present language requirement. For example, the doctoral programs at Oklahoma State and Kansas State require competency in only one foreign language. The department might consider reviewing how those departments test their students and adopt a similar set of requirements and chronology.
Facilities and Resources
Rating: Satisfactory

As indicated by internal faculty and student surveys and by the majority of faculty and students interviewed, the existing space, physical resources and technology available were adequate for the program. There was a consensus that adequate support staff for the department is lacking. Additional support staff is a necessity. There are currently only two secretaries who also serve as receptionists. This is not enough support staff to accommodate a faculty of 31 faculty and 20 GPTI’s. An assistant for the graduate advisor position is imperative.

Regardless of perceptions that facilities and resources are adequate, the committee finds that technological support is limited. Minimal effort has been made toward developing distance learning. With the exception of efforts within the Vietnam Center, there appears to be limited use of new technology within the department. There were reports of outdated maps and chalk boards (instead of white boards) in classrooms. Increased funding is necessary for classroom instructional resources to be updated.

Conclusions

The Department of History is to be commended for the progress it has made under the leadership of Dr. Jorge Iber. With a strong base of established scholars as senior faculty and with an energetic and capable junior faculty along with talented and intelligent graduate students, the graduate program within the History Department is ready to flourish and to enhance the academic reputation of Texas Tech University. However, an issue of concern exists. A serious problem remains endemic within the department. This problem can best be classified as a pervasive negative faculty cultural reflected by lack of collegiality and lack of trust. It is in this areas that a proactive effort must be made to ameliorate a past history of long standing feuds and petty jealousies that are detrimental to the future growth and development of a potentially outstanding graduate program. Now is an opportunity for healing within what appears to have been previously a dysfunctional department. This committee strongly encourages the implementation of efforts to create a culture of mutual respect and unity among the faculty.