

Program Evaluation Report External Reviewer

Program Reviewed: History

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Fitchburg State University Site Visit Report

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Goals of program reviews:

The primary goal of the program review process is to improve teaching and learning. Program reviews also provide faculty and administration the opportunity to periodically examine: (1) the extent to which programs are meeting their goals and outcomes, (2) the relationship of the program outcomes to any specific programmatic, school, or university missions, (3) the dimensions of program quality, and (4) the effective and efficient use of university resources.

The history program self-study identified a program “that continues to provide quality education for undergraduate and graduate students, despite facing challenges common to humanities programs nationwide.” Further, the self-study provided an in-depth overview, links to mission and professionalism, use of data, and comments on the program’s place within the larger home of Fitchburg State in general.

Undergraduate and graduate programs: This program review includes discussion of both graduate and undergraduate programs where applicable.

I. Mission

The mission of the program should state a clear purpose, identifying a focus for, in this case, the study of history. The mission should be attainable. The program may choose to provide a vision and/or a values statement in addition to the mission. The mission of the program should align with the Fitchburg State Mission.

Fitchburg State, is committed to excellence in teaching and learning and blends liberal arts and sciences and professional programs within a small college environment. Our comprehensive public university prepares students to lead, serve, and succeed by fostering lifelong learning and civic and global responsibility. A Fitchburg State education extends beyond our classrooms to include residential, professional, and co-curricular opportunities. As a community resource, we provide leadership and support for the economic, environmental, social, and cultural needs of North Central Massachusetts and the Commonwealth.

Fitchburg State offers programs which value accessibility, affordability, community, enrichment, and excellence.

The Program Mission Statement:

1. Is published in the catalog and on the department website – no
2. Is aligned with university, school and department missions – via interpretation, yes
3. Has an identifiable focus – via interpretation, yes
4. Is attainable and assessable – to attain and assess, a formal statement should be created
5. Has been revised or updated for this review – no

Narrative Comments:

The program does not have a mission statement per se, but there is clear and focused language in the catalog that could be adapted for this purpose. For example, from the summary statement in the catalog, “students taking history courses obtain training in problem solving through the analysis of data and literary and artistic evidence to put forth and evaluate arguments, practice effective skills of communication in expressing ideas, obtain knowledge of citizenship at the local, national and global levels, confront ethical issues in historical reasoning and research, and understand context.” This language ties to part of the university’s mission to support social and cultural needs in North Central Massachusetts and the Commonwealth more broadly. In addition, the self-study emphasizes that by teaching critical thinking, research, communication, historical inquiry and analysis, along with fostering accessibility and affordability, the program is connected to the current strategic goals, general education, and vision for Fitchburg State. Students in the major have the opportunity to apply their knowledge to careers such as education and law and it is clear that the department is collaborating with other institutions of higher learning or cultural importance in the area. The program should take the time to develop a specific mission statement that articulates their contributions.

II. Strategic Plan

The university has a strategic plan running 2020-2025. An update available through the university website provided a summary report related to 2021-2024. This campus-wide plan is shared with faculty, staff, students, alumni, and other interested constituencies. Presumably, a new strategic plan for the university is in development stages, similar to the current process ongoing at the reviewer's home institution. The program does not have an independent strategic plan.

1. Is used in data-driven decision-making – yes at the university level
2. Is aligned with university strategic plan – possibly despite no formal program strategic plan for the program itself
3. Has clearly stated objectives/outcomes - no (but there was a clear action plan list from 2018)
4. Includes a timetable for implementation – no (but there were accomplishments related to the action plan)
5. Assessment of strategic plan – no in that there is no formal plan, but yes in that the self-study addressed the prior review and action plan
6. Shows evidence of consultation with external communities including advisory boards - no
7. Has been shared with all constituencies – unknown (clearly within the department and administration – students? Alumni?)
8. Has been revised or updated for this review - no

Narrative Comments:

The program has conducted prior self-studies and used that information to develop action plans and program updates responding to curriculum and policy shifts and has collected information that allows for developing a more long-term strategic plan. While seemingly reactive at times, there is purpose placed into various course development offered in history at both the undergraduate and graduate level.¹ The history program has clearly participated in implementing the larger strategic plan for the university (which runs 2020-2025). This can be seen in course offerings through the

¹ From the perspective of this reviewer, I understand the instinct to place the majority of history courses, including numerous electives, in the Historical Inquiry and Analysis area of general education. But there are two concerns I note. First, is there value in placing a course like HIST 2022, Constructing History or HIST 4500, Senior Seminar in general education? I can see an argument for HIST 2021, Reading Historical Landscapes, but the other two courses seem like a reach for non-majors. Full disclosure, one student I met WAS a non-major and expressed only positive comments about HIST 2022! Second, as I look at the [rubric](#) for Historical Inquiry and Analysis, as well as the [report from 2024](#) I wonder several things. Which classes were the artifacts pulled from for this analysis? Given the layers of the rubric, how effective is HI in an introductory course like HIST 1000 or HIST 1400? As most artifacts revealed students falling into the “developing” and “refining” category I hoped that the artifacts were not pulled from a course like HIST 2022, though refining might make sense there. Finally, I was a bit concerned to see N/A reported on the artifacts for “Identify, read and analyze historical sources, extracting explicit and inferred information to identify historical perspectives.” Even with my reservations about placing a course like HIST 1000 or HIST 1400 in the HI category, I would hope an artifact from that course would reveal that students do read and analyze historical sources!

reformed general education for Fitchburg State, including participation in First Year Experience seminar development, addressing the need to introduce multiple modalities for course offerings, transforming the graduate M.A. in history, etc. It is evident that the actions of the program are congruent with the strategic plan of the university, even if there is no clearly stated strategic plan for the program itself. In addition, actions taken by the program appear to have the support of most program faculty and the university administration and reflects the role of the history program within the larger community. It appears that the university uses the strategic plan in data-driven decision-making. The plan is shared with faculty, students, staff, alumni, advisory board, and other interested constituencies. If this program review is indicative of the entire body, it appears that the Economics, History, and Political Science Department is using quantitative as well as qualitative information to help guide decision-making in ways that are significant. The history program uses the professional conduct statement from the American Historical Association. Given that the university currently has not published a new campus-wide strategic plan (the existing plan concludes 2025), the general direction of the program appears to be appropriate as it seeks to engage with the larger community in course planning and current offerings, including experiential learning opportunities such as “*Perseverantia*: The Fitchburg State Podcast Network.” In addition, it is clear the program is engaged in providing the university's students with access to a high-quality education focused on developing an engaged citizenry as well as embracing diversity and inclusiveness. The program recognizes the need for interdepartmental cooperation and should be encouraged to rebuild ties with the Education Department in relation to the various teaching licensure programs. Additional efforts at expanding outreach with alumni and current students to share the excellent work of the department and acquire additional feedback, as well as gathering recommendations for future change is highly encouraged. The current students I met during the visit were inquisitive and interested in my role, as well as their part in offering insight into the department, its courses, and its program of study. These students, a mixture of majors, double majors, and non-majors, clearly enjoyed their experiences with courses in the history program both for content and skill development as well as the support demonstrated by various professors.

III. Curriculum

The program curriculum should be coherent, current, and based in the theoretical foundations of the discipline. Student learning outcomes should be presented in courses that are arranged to show the depth and breadth of the learning. In most programs, this will be hierarchical, showing how the student will progress through the discipline. The prerequisite structure of the curriculum should also be evident to indicate the layering of required knowledge, thus enabling students to be successful in their progress through the program.

The stated program goals should focus on the student learning and competencies needed for the students to be lifelong learners and to be successful in their chosen career.

1. Is consistent with mission of institution – yes
2. Is current – yes
3. Supports multiple pedagogical styles – yes
4. Has experiential learning integrated into the curriculum – yes
5. Is based on the theoretical foundations of discipline – yes
6. Provides for research opportunities for faculty and students – yes
7. Is reviewed on a regular cycle – yes
8. Ensures that students have systematic, substantial, and sequential learning – yes

Narrative Comments:

Both the undergraduate and graduate programs incorporate best practices from the American Historical Association. The undergraduate curriculum seeks to provide students with a foundation of historical knowledge (introductory courses in world and U.S. history) as well as scaffolded skills of analysis and interpretation (courses such as Reading Historical Landscapes or Constructing History). The graduate program starts students with a Historiography course, laying the groundwork for their following courses. Learning outcomes related to the curriculum are easily found in the catalog. The graduate program's curriculum affords students the opportunity to more deeply explore historical study and analysis in a flexible, thirty-credit program that includes both a thesis and non-thesis track and exposure to content, historiography, and methodology. The graduate program's manual is extremely clear, allowing students to plan out their progress to thesis or non-thesis track. The self-study did not include sample syllabus material but course syllabus statements that can be found online do include learning outcomes. The self-study indicates that a goal is to continue to strengthen the academic coherence and scaffolding that have been emplaced in prior years to continue making improvements in student performance in relation to program learning outcomes. The program is to be commended for reviewing its curriculum carefully and on a regular schedule, extending its course offerings to connect with the campus and Fitchburg community, and finding ways to link the different disciplines within the department together. Recognizing the need for conservative approaches in the current enrollment environment, I recommend that the university actively support all three of the majors within this department, paying close attention to staffing needs. The history program can serve students with the current number of faculty but, the university needs to be conscious of the limitations that currently exist. Historians, while they may work as generalists to a degree, are not able to offer deep, meaningful exploration of subjects for which they were not

trained. Losses in Asian and Native American History are meaningful and should not be overlooked. The university might explore grant-based resources that would allow for temporary visiting professors to expand program offerings.

The program has discussed course modality and students also referenced this topic. Several students noted, they were comfortable in hybrid and online modalities but when “done correctly.” Students further explained that instructor clarity and organization of the online material in hybrid and online courses was what they meant when saying “done correctly.” The university has already created rubrics for courses in general education and collected data on how courses meet expectations. As the university explores its next strategic plan, perhaps the program could volunteer to be part of a new assessment strategy exploring how courses taught in various modalities impact student learning outcomes. Such a study could both help the program confirm that they have the best ratio of hybrid, online, and full F2F offerings, and provide the university with a model for SLO assessment-modality intersections. The program currently has a good balance in terms of course modality offerings at the undergraduate level. While the program believes that the current advising load is reasonable and manageable, all faculty members expressed the desire to strengthen campus culture in general regarding advising. This last challenge is particularly noted in reference to a common pathway in relation to the curriculum which leads to initial licensure as a secondary school teacher. It is clear that the administration needs to engage in more oversight in how the Program Area in Secondary & Middle School Education (PASM) is currently functioning as well as reconsider alternate professional responsibility (APR) credit for secondary coordinators. This reviewer has served as the history secondary education coordinator for Westfield State since 2009, seeing a variety of changes wrought to licensure visited upon licensure both by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and by decisions made by the Education Department at Westfield State. I have also worked through three different accreditation types for licensure and none of that work has been conducted without APR credits. To ask faculty to do this kind of work and advising, vital to a large percentage of majors within the program, is simply not fair. Licensure is complicated, and, as long as the system runs as described in the report, apparently often confusing for both faculty and students. On a separate curricular note, given comments from NECHE reviewers, the administration, and the program self-study, a conversation about the continuation of the two bachelor’s degree pathways should occur. Similar to a challenge faced by my colleagues in the English Department at Westfield State, the connection between language requirements for the B.A. versus the B.S. seems to be corralling students in a particular direction. The program should make a determination about what to do with these pathways. On the one hand, general education does include a minimum of three credits for World Languages and the B.A. demands “foreign language proficiency at the intermediate level.” Perhaps the terms proficiency and intermediate should be very clearly defined – their meaning can be extrapolated from information on the university website and catalog. With the requirement of at least three credits already, it may be worth keeping the B.A. pathway or at least actively advise and encourage students to pursue college-level foreign language study. On the other hand, given the numbers of students currently avoiding the B.A. pathway completely, might the program consider carrying only the B.S. while advising students interested in graduate study in history to take additional foreign languages?

IV. Assessment of Student Learning

Assessment of student learning should be measured not only on factual knowledge, but also the development of skills, behaviors, and attitudes needed for subsequent education and practice. Assessment is based on clear statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their program. Assessment provides useful information that helps the department to improve the experiences provided for students, as well as to assure that the level of student achievement is appropriate for the degree awarded.

The program should assess knowledge within the discipline as well as knowledge of intellectual and practical skills, personal and social responsibility, and integrative and applied learning. Assessment requires a variety of methods that can measure not only the acquisition of skills but also the process and procedures which will be necessary for career entry or graduate school.

1. Clearly stated program and course learning outcomes (SLOs) on course syllabi – as seen on sample syllabus material discovered online
2. Program SLOs are published - yes
3. Courses taught in all modalities have consistent SLOs – presumably
4. Coherent hierarchy of course-level student learning outcomes – Developing
5. Students receive advising on a regular basis – yes
6. Functioning assessment plan – yes
7. The program uses a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods and direct and indirect measures to understand the experiences and learning outcomes of its students – yes
8. Assessment is an ongoing focus of the program - yes
9. Assessment embedded within the curriculum – yes
10. Multiple data sources are used in assessment - yes
11. Courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels are assessed at the appropriate level - partially
12. Online, blended and face-to-face courses are assessed equally – presumably

Narrative Comments:

The program identified several important areas of progress and questions in the context of the review that relate to assessment and it is obvious that the program is making an effort to analyze how student learning outcomes are revealed in the classroom. Further, both curriculum and program-wide decisions are being impacted by looking at this information and asking questions about the position of foundational survey courses, how high impact practices might improve student learning, etc. The analysis of undergraduate student work from the Reading Historical Landscapes and Constructing History courses is a vitally important step in investigating the link between course material and the student learning outcomes. Pages 14-16 of the self-study in particular outline the

potential gains seen in critical reading and academic writing skills at the undergraduate level. While undergraduate majors seem to be expanding their understanding of some aspects of historical inquiry, seeing more information on the process by which the review was conducted would be helpful. A similar analysis of the growing number of students in the M.A. program should be conducted in addition to a re-development of the student learning outcomes for the M.A. Working to understand whether students need additional preparation to better contextualize and evaluate sources, interweave analysis of source material, increase powers of analysis, and develop their arguments effectively while placing their own work in relation to scholarship of others is an important goal for assessment in both the undergraduate and graduate programs. One suggestion to meet a need is to perhaps simplify the rubric used in analyzing courses tagged as HI. The methodology as described on page 15 of the self-study should work moving forward. For the graduate program, adapting rubrics used in the undergraduate program may provide a starting point to see the progress of writing and research in either thesis or non-thesis track. At the undergraduate level, as the data grows, the program should see how students increase achievement by the time they reach the capstone course.

V. Faculty

Faculty qualifications, numbers, and performance are sufficient to accomplish the institution and department missions and purposes. Faculty competently offer the departmental academic programs and fulfill those tasks appropriately assigned them. The program faculty have taken responsibility for the development and oversight of all aspects of the program.

1. The preparation and qualifications of faculty are appropriate to the field and level of their assignments – yes
2. Department conducts regular meetings, circulates minutes - yes
3. Current Vitae are current and available - précis version, yes
4. Number of faculty appropriate for teaching, advising, service requirements of department and university – yes
5. Faculty participate in professional development and scholarly activities to keep current in their fields - yes

Narrative Comments:

In the course of the visit, I was able to meet with full-time faculty in a variety of settings to converse about their impressions of the university, student, and the department. The faculty are committed to their discipline and to extending the programmatic offerings of the department. They clearly strive to create opportunities, where possible given the university structure in terms of scheduling and credit for instruction, for collaborative and interdisciplinary learning, as well as training for professional programs. An area the faculty wish to improve is hiring additional colleagues to address content deficiencies. Another concern expressed in the review is focused on the issue of serving those students who pursue teaching careers at the elementary or secondary level. While the department would certainly benefit from the full-time hire of a member with another content speciality, the larger challenge seems to be regarding the relationship with the licensure program for secondary education. As noted earlier, the administration should foster a closer relationship with PASM and return the APR credit to any faculty member in the program who guides licensure. In addition, the administration should ensure that PASM enhances its communication and record keeping to better serve students seeking licensure as well as the faculty who conduct that work. The university might consider using models like a "teacher in residence" position or adjunct faculty to aid students in preparing for the secondary career path if, for some reason, APR credits are anathema, but working with full-time faculty who are given the time needed to develop clear advising and coaching strategies related to licensure is preferred. Building close relationships between prospective teacher candidates and faculty members focused on US and World history subjects as well as American national government courses that align with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks would be helpful as well. Currently, the history license candidates do get exposure to at least six credits in political science. While this is more of a curricular recommendation, requiring a course in economics is suggested. Another department with which to foster relations would be Geography and Earth Sciences. Candidates interested in teaching grades 6 and 7 must have facility with geography and ancient history (the latter point of which speaks to another deficit noted by the program). Finally,

while the graduate program chair has done well to expand the program and recruit additional faculty, the university should consider working with DGCE to determine how best compensate this position. For example, the chair of the Masters in Public Administration at Westfield State has APR rather than a stipend which gives that individual more time.

VI. Resources

The program has sufficient and appropriate financial, physical and technological resources necessary to provide a high-quality academic program. The program equipment is up to date and sufficient to achieve the departmental and university missions.

1. Adequate resources to support department and university missions - partially
2. Resources available reflect what is needed to offer high-quality experiences for students - yes
3. The physical facilities are accessible, appropriate, safe, and sufficient to achieve the program's mission and outcomes - yes
4. The program has adequate clerical and technical staff, and support services – yes
5. Library and technology resources are appropriate and sufficient to achieve the program's mission and outcomes - yes though the library budget is noted as flat

Narrative Comments:

The faculty are committed to their discipline and to meeting needs of both the program and the university. There appear to be gaps in terms of annual budget (the amount, referenced as “small” (page 37) can be interpreted to be far below the budget for a history department I headed at a secondary school some 18 years ago (n=\$12,000). The university leadership should be pleased with plans over time to preserve and enhance existing physical space on campus over the last decade plus. The faculty are active in research and service, in some instances participating in a variety of scholarly activities and course development as well as service to the broader community, while maintaining their teaching obligations. Faculty help support a variety of important campus resources like the Center for Italian Culture and Adult Learning in the Fitchburg Area. As has been stated elsewhere in the review, the program has adequate training for online instruction. The Center for Teaching and Learning provides support for pedagogical discussion and innovation. The history program's desire to actively market remote learning programs such as an online minor in history should be fully embraced along with any similar needs from other departments. The resources needed for the online instruction are already in place, students can, as described in the self-study, get through the minor online already, so using university resources to market this possibility seems like a straight-forward step that would benefit the program and the university. In terms of library access, there was general agreement that annual reviews of materials that are currently, or could be made available through electronic subscription services should be continued. Library staff and existing archival resources seem to provide riches for the program to promote and use. This reviewer appreciated the time allowed in the site visit for meeting library staff and the rich analysis of contact points, inquiries, etc. that the report included on pages 30-36.

VII. Graduate Programs

Graduate degree programs are designed to give students a mastery of a complex field of study or professional area. Programs have an appropriate rationale; their clarity and order are visible in stated requirements, in relevant official publications, and in the demonstrated learning experiences of graduates. Learning objectives reflect a high level of complexity, specialization, and generalization.

1. Clear differentiation between requirements for graduate and undergraduate degrees offered in the same program - yes
2. The program affords the student a broad conceptual mastery of the field of professional practice of its subject matter, literature, theory, and methods – yes
3. Faculty responsible for graduate programs are sufficient by credentials, experience, number, and time commitment for the successful accomplishment of program objectives and program improvement - partially
4. The graduate program has a cohesive curriculum and requires scholarly and professional activities designed to advance the student substantially beyond the educational accomplishments of a baccalaureate degree program – yes
5. The graduate program encompasses research activities and professional practice and defines their relative emphases in program outcomes reflected in curricular, scholarly, and program requirements – partially

Narrative Comments:

The department reorganized the graduate program and have slightly differentiated SLOs for the M.A. How additional advising for graduate students and course requirements are accomplished might be explored more fully in order to better prepare students for foundations in historical methods and writing. As a former program supervisor for graduate programs at Westfield State, I found it difficult to create a cohort of students when many courses are taken as directed studies. The online option utilized at Fitchburg is helpful. Making all thesis submissions digitally available would help promote both the work done by students and the program in general. I have noted in other sections some other needs, but to recapitulate, help the program thrive and continue to grow by offering an APR for the program chair rather than a stipend, review the SLOs to continue to differentiate between undergraduate and graduate students, and develop adapted rubrics on writing and analysis.

VIII. Additional Comments and Recommendations

I visited Fitchburg State University on April 1, 2025 to discuss and learn more about the Economics, History, and Political Science Department's program review on history. My meetings with committee members and available department members, librarians, students, as well as the Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences, Dr. Sara Levine, along with Provost Dr. Patricia Marshall, were extremely helpful. The faculty remain vigorous and dedicated to the task of instructing their majors, minors/concentrations, and general education students.

I would have appreciated an opportunity to meet, for extended periods of time, additional full-time and adjunct faculty and other constituencies, including graduate students. Further, I believe meeting with additional full-time faculty members in small groups would have proven helpful. While some faculty chose not to participate on this particular day, a wider availability to further discuss some potential conflicts, the self-study, resources, and student success stories, as well as challenges not identified in writing, would have been welcomed.

In light of the work already underway to support university-wide assessment continued work at applying the assessment principles regarding the history courses should be supported for all areas – historical inquiry and analysis, civic learning, diverse perspectives, etc. The program is already looking at a wide array of information and should be both praised for these efforts and encouraged to go further.

Where possible, the development and alumni offices should provide support to the program (and the department as a whole) as they seek input from this group. Support can be as simple as sharing contact information including physical and electronic mail addresses. Alumni often provide unique perspectives and insight on how to update elements of the program or continue what exists.

The program already accomplishes much, serving nearly 1000 Fitchburg State students in history courses each academic year (self-study, page 5). With institutional support for the online minor in history, the department can increase its reach into online programs, providing Fitchburg with an opportunity to expand student numbers in a way already accomplished at the graduate program level.

I should note that my visit coincided with the growing realization across the nation that national support for higher education is under assault and actions taken by the federal government will undoubtedly have a massive impact on higher education. This matter was at the forefront of several of our conversations and interactions and, indeed, by the close of April, it has become increasingly clear that all faculty should be preparing for, at the very least, ways to do more with less. As the situation evolves, both at my home institution and at Fitchburg State, our sister institutions face an almost existential crisis. I raise this issue because, as it happens, the department's review explored weaknesses and strengths as they currently existed in serving interests of students, online instruction, and more. These questions will be more salient as our institutions continue to plan for educating our students in light of national policies and potential changes dictated by the commonwealth's board of education.