

History Program Review: Response to External Review September 2018

<p>Recruitment and retention efforts could emphasize the wide range of courses available and also highlight these diverse opportunities the program provides for its students.</p>	<p>Recruitment and retention are major priorities for the history program. We have recently updated our Open House presentation with the aim of defining what skills we offer and what career paths our students can pursue in order to more effectively market our program incoming students. We have begun to enlist student representatives of the majors to attend the recruiting events in order to provide the student perspective for prospective students. We are providing programming, such as lectures and game nights, to cultivate a sense of community within the program. The historians will continue to explore new methods to recruit students and to publicize courses. The historians have seen the number of history minors increase significantly and will continue to pursue recruitment through advising as well as in elective courses with large numbers of non-majors.</p>
<p>The new sequence, HIST 2021 (Reading the Historical Landscape) and HIST 2022 (Constructing History) was taught for the first time in AY 17-18. The History program will surely assess the effectiveness of the change over the coming years.</p>	<p>The historians have been assessing senior seminar performance annually for over ten years. With the advent of HIST2021 and Hist2022, the historians began collecting data to assess the effectiveness of the new course sequence in senior seminar performance. They will analyze this data annually as it accumulates.</p>
<p>Alongside that assessment, the program would be well-advised to consider whether students are still taking a range of elective courses that includes the study of non-western areas now that the distribution requirement has been eliminated.</p>	<p>Much of the historians' teaching load is taken up by introductory-level surveys, methods courses, Latin, field supervision, and the graduate program. Moreover, many of their course offerings span broad geographic areas—the Atlantic World, North and South America, Eurasia. These factors, combined with course reductions and sabbaticals, make it unlikely that a student could take 5 electives in a single geographic area. Nevertheless, the historians will continue to monitor this issue.</p>
	<p>The historians will meet in AY 2018-2019 to develop a course numbering system to differentiate 2000-level from 3000-level</p>

<p>The administrative task of rationalizing course numbering, while onerous, should also be undertaken. For consistency, the faculty are advised to consider the extent and level of research and writing expectations as they evaluate and adjust course numbering.</p>	<p>courses while making sure such changes do not have an adverse effect on enrollment.</p>
<p>In terms of scheduling, they [students] noted that as they became more advanced, it was more difficult to take electives because of the senior seminar or because of required education classes. If it is possible to adjust scheduling to avoid these conflicts, it would be helpful for students.</p>	<p>The historians have been scheduling the senior seminar and Special Methods in History to ensure that they do not conflict with history electives. The same holds true for at least some of the education courses, such as EDUC3122 (Sheltered English Immersion). The historians will continue to minimize potential conflicts for classes scheduled by the Education department.</p>
<p>[Regarding requiring both second-year methods courses.] This is an advising issue, however, not a curriculum problem. They absolutely should be required to take both methods courses; without experience doing the work of historians, their effectiveness as teachers will be reduced.</p>	<p>Despite the unhappiness of some students about having to take Constructing History, the reason the course was created was because students arrive at the university with deficits in reading, critical thinking, and writing-skills that teachers, historians, and well-educated students alike need to be successful. Moreover, data collected from that course indicates that students have low expectations about the amount of reading and writing appropriate to any university course. This will continue to be reinforced both within history courses and during advising.</p>
<p>[Regarding] how to apply some of the concepts from those classes to their future plans to teach at the middle school or high school level. This is an opportunity for improving advising, both in and outside of classes in the History program and in the Education department. The faculty should think about ways to increase students' understanding of the relevance of their undergraduate coursework to different careers, including (but not limited to) teaching.</p>	<p>The two-course methods sequence in AY 17-18 concluded with just such an exploration of the relevance of historical skills gained through the study of history to multiple types of careers--not only teaching in public secondary schools. This includes the fact that ALL history majors are required to take minors in different disciplines. Minors lead to enhanced career opportunities in fields such as geography, communications and human resources.</p>
	<p>The history faculty are committed to training students, regardless of their minor, in the field</p>

<p>The program faculty could also consider whether it would be appropriate to allow students interested in education to occasionally have the alternative of writing a lesson plan or unit plan rather than completing certain traditional assignments. It would be a disservice to allow students to completely avoid learning how to complete regular assignments, but there may be situations in which a teaching-oriented option could be beneficial.</p>	<p>of history. Best practices in the discipline of history at the university-level require students to read, research, and master writing based on research and on analysis of historiography.</p>
<p>One area that could be improved is in the History faculty's collaboration with the library to discuss collection management through both weeding and acquisitions. Developing strong communication between the library and the faculty will be essential to ensuring that the library's collection of print and ebooks and serials is balanced and appropriate to the program's needs</p>	<p>The history faculty will communicate to the library their requests for additional books in print and electronic format.</p>
<p>It would be beneficial to the program and to the university if an occasional course release were available to reward and incentivize the faculty's research productivity. While this may be challenging because of campus norms and contractual obligations, it is a question worth revisiting periodically. The faculty and administration are encouraged to consider other ways of recognizing faculty productivity, including permitting faculty an occasional opportunity to teach one section that is larger than standard instead of two smaller sections.</p>	<p>The university administration has total control over the dispensation of course releases for research. There is no contractual language limiting the number of course releases that the administration can offer, but traditionally the administration has been extremely parsimonious in offering course releases, especially considering the 4-4 teaching load of Fitchburg State University. In one option, some historians may explore piloting the idea of teaching double-sections, and historians could also explore alternative pedagogies as technology evolves, but these too, would be up to the administration.</p>
<p>The faculty in the History program face a number of other challenges that could be remediated. Students with weak reading and writing skills when they arrive at Fitchburg State need continuing support to improve those skills. The History program could play an important role in assisting those students. Reading and writing are at the core of a</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Historians strongly support increased focus on reading and writing across the curriculum. Reading and writing are linked skills. Those who read well typically write well. Students' needs in these areas prompted the creation of the two-course second-year history methods sequence.

<p>historian's work and coordination between the program and the writing center could be very beneficial for these students as well as those who enter the university with a stronger academic preparation. There are a number of ways that this coordination could occur, such as a writing coach assigned to a specific survey course, or a first- or second-year History course that satisfies a general education requirement and works closely with the writing center. The program faculty and administration are encouraged to consider specific ways that they can improve students' reading and writing skills, as these are critical to their success in other courses as well.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The historians strongly support the creation of an active Writing Center and the idea of assigning qualified writing coaches to history courses and would support the creation of these positions at the university. The historians anticipate that the FYE program, which will be required of all incoming first year students starting in AY 2019-2020, will improve student reading and writing expectations and effectiveness in their college careers. • The historians are already discussing the use of a common writing feedback form in upper-level electives, building on the use of such forms in the HIST 2021/2022 and HIST 4500 courses.
<p>The program faculty should consider ways of attracting students to the major and actively marketing courses, especially electives, perhaps through a course fair. Some students may also be attracted by the possibility of completing both a BA and an MA, so promoting both together could be one of several ways of attracting students. Efforts to improve recruitment and retention can also focus on History's place in the liberal arts curriculum. They can reduce the number of course cancellations as well, which is a challenge for faculty because they are unpredictable. If the registrar and administrators can lessen the unpredictability of this, it would be helpful for faculty.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The historians have emphasized recruitment of minors and will continue to do so. • We have recently updated our Open House presentation with the aim of defining what skills we offer and what career paths our students can pursue in order to more effectively market our program incoming students. • The historians are providing some programming, such as lectures and game nights, to cultivate a sense of community within the program to better retain majors and to attract current non-majors to the history major and our minors. • The historians will consider creating a course fair. • The historians will discuss the possibility of an integrated BA/MA program.

