Dean’s Response to the Program Review Committee’s Final Report  
Department of History  
October 2004

The Program Review Committee’s (PRC) final report makes clear that the Department of History contributes significantly to the University’s mission. In addition to serving History majors and graduate students, the department teaches a large number of general education courses and delivers the equivalent of a “minor” to several hundred students in the College of Education and Human Development’s integrated social studies program. The department can also be proud of its high level of scholarly productivity—in terms both of quality and quantity. Faculty scholarship enhances the quality of instruction at all levels of the curriculum, is essential to ensure a strong graduate program, and contributes to the discipline of history. I also applaud the department for the ways many of its faculty serve the College, University, and the profession, as well as for their engagement with external constituencies.

While the department is doing a good job in many respects, PRC has identified a number of issues that require attention. Assessment has indicated that the undergraduate curriculum needs serious attention. The relationship between the M.A. program(s) and the Ph.D. program should be clarified, and the department must devote attention to achieving greater visibility for its doctoral program in policy history. The PRC also identifies department governance and allocation of service responsibilities as matters to be addressed.

In his response to the PRC’s report, Dr. Peter Way, the Department Chair, accepts the PRC’s principal recommendations. However, he takes issue with several of its findings (the relationship between the masters and doctoral programs, the role of the Executive Committee in scheduling, the feasibility of departmental initiatives to increase doctoral stipends, and the need to delineate further the role of the Executive and Curriculum committees). He also asks for clarification of several of the PRC’s recommendations.

Dr. Way makes a number of important observations, and I have incorporated several of them into my own response. While I accept the PRC’s recommendations, the following comments elaborate on and, in several cases, modify them.

I understand that offering HIST 480—a research seminar—to all integrated social studies majors as well as to History majors creates scheduling challenges and taxes the personnel resources of the department. However, these are all BGSU students whom the department has an obligation to serve. Delivering a course like HIST 480 to integrated social studies majors is consistent with the College’s longstanding responsibility to provide high quality discipline-based courses to students preparing for teaching careers, whether in the sciences, mathematics, English, or history. I encourage discussions between the History Department and the College of Education and Human Development about strategies for improving the preparation of social studies teachers and would be happy to facilitate them. However, the department should work directly with the College of Arts & Sciences to assure that it has adequate staff to meet its instructional responsibilities.
While most of our efforts in assessment have focused on undergraduate majors, we have an obligation to assess how well we are achieving the learning outcomes established for our graduate programs. During the past two years, the Graduate College has required all graduate programs to develop assessment plans and report the results on an annual basis. While the PRC urges the department to develop an assessment plan that relies on external reviewers to evaluate theses and dissertations, this should be taken as a suggestion rather than a requirement. The department should develop a program that is feasible to implement and will provide meaningful feedback on how well its graduate programs are achieving their learning outcomes.

One of the principal challenges facing the department is revision of the undergraduate curriculum. One aspect of that challenge is making decisions about whether it should offer as many general education courses—especially at the 300- and 400-levels—as it currently does. Another is deciding whether HIST 480 is a capstone course and establishing clearer expectations for what the course is to accomplish. The greatest challenge, however, is establishing a curriculum that helps majors acquire critical skills and knowledge in a progressive, graduated fashion. The results of the department’s assessment efforts make clear that too many History majors are not achieving the learning outcomes for the major and suggest the need to develop critical skills earlier in students’ undergraduate program. Developing a curriculum that addresses this concern is the principal challenge the department faces with respect to its undergraduate program. I ask that the Department Chair report on the progress of curriculum revision by June 2005 and submit annual progress reports in succeeding years.

I agree with Dr. Way that the breadth of the department’s M.A. program is not inconsistent with its niche doctoral program in policy history. Good students who enter the M.A. program in history with little understanding of or commitment to policy history often find the field attractive and enter the doctoral program. Because policy history Ph.D. students need broad preparation if they are to be competitive in the academic job market, the non-policy history courses the masters program sustains also meet the needs of policy history students. At the same time, I agree with the PRC that a thorough review of the masters program is necessary to assure that it meshes well with the Ph.D. program in policy history. I especially encourage the department to decide whether it will develop a pass through masters program. Such a program has been discussed for several years, and it is now time for the department to act. I ask the department to make this a prominent feature of the report on its graduate programs that it will submit to the College of Arts & Sciences and the Graduate College by August 2005. It is critical that the report be submitted by the beginning of the 2005-06 academic year so that any changes recommended can be incorporated into recruitment materials for the 2005-06 recruitment cycle.

The department has a strong, well-published faculty and perhaps the most extensive policy history program in the country. Yet the external reviewers concluded that the program lacks national visibility. One consequence is that the number of highly qualified applicants has been quite small. Therefore, it is vital to the program’s future that the department develop a strategy to enhance the program’s national visibility and increase the applicant pool. Moreover, the department must move swiftly, systematically, and energetically to implement its strategy. I ask that the department chair submit a report to the Dean of the Graduate College and me by April 2005 outlining the department’s strategy for increasing visibility, the steps taken and planned to
implement it, and benchmarks to measure success. The chair should follow up annually with updates on the department’s success in pursuing this strategy.

As a matter of clarification, PRC has consistently addressed the issue of faculty workload in its reports and made recommendations—as it has done in the History report—to assure that its concerns are addressed and that departmental follow-up is monitored.

While the chair must have final authority for scheduling courses, I agree with Dr. Way that it is useful for the Executive Committee to provide feedback on the schedule drafted by the chair. Because the Graduate Coordinator and the Undergraduate Coordinator sit on the Executive Committee, they are able to provide advice concerning whether there is an appropriate mix of courses necessary to meet the needs of graduate and undergraduate students. Consultation need not compromise the chair’s authority in scheduling.

I share the PRC’s concern that tenure track faculty have been drawn too heavily into service and support its recommendation that the department moderate their service responsibilities. I do have some concerns about Dr. Way’s statement that in limiting the service responsibilities of tenure track faculty, the department will privilege departmental service over College and University service. Junior faculty benefit from the perspectives they gain and the relationships they build by serving outside their home departments and in the community. Similarly, departments benefit from having faculty engaged in the life of the College, the University, and the community. While the service commitments of tenure track faculty should be limited, they should not be discouraged from becoming involved in extra-departmental service. As a matter of equity, service performed within the department ought not be privileged over College, University, or community service. Moreover, as the University seeks to promote community engagement, the department should encourage faculty to find ways to integrate their teaching and research with service. The department has enjoyed success in doing this already—notably in its Teaching American History Grants, its internship programs, and History Professional Day—and can build on these successes to encourage a more holistic view of faculty responsibilities.

While the department is free to revisit its criteria for promotion and tenure, I agree with the PRC that its current formulation is appropriate, avoiding overly mechanistic standards. In considering promotion and tenure cases, the College is consistent in the standards it applies to promotion and tenure decisions while recognizing that the nature of scholarship and the allocation of effort varies across departments within the College.

The department has some important and challenging issues to address. However, it does so from a position of strength. I look forward to working with Dr. Way and his colleagues in the coming years to make a good department stronger.

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Donald G. Nieman, Dean

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John W. Folkins, Provost                        Date