To: Don Nieman  
Dean, College of Arts & Sciences

From: Peter Way  
Chair, Department of History

Re: Department of History Program Review Committee Report

Date: June 28, 2004

This memo constitutes the Department of History’s response to the report of the Program Review Committee (PRC), dated May 26, 2004.

The Department is appreciative of the Committee’s recognition of its “excellent record of scholarship; its extensive contributions to undergraduate education at the University; and the development of a strong and distinctive doctoral program in policy history.” Our faculty members, indeed, “are both teachers and scholars . . . working hard both individually and collectively to offer outstanding educational programs and to contribute to the knowledge base of their discipline.” We also acknowledge that there are “several issues the Department should address.” In fact, the Program Review exercise has been helpful to the Department in identifying area where remedial action is necessary.

What follows is a point-by-point response to the PRC’s comments and recommendations (in italics).

1. Undergraduate Majors and Minors

Recommendations. The Department, with the assistance of the Dean of Arts and Sciences, should open/continue discussions with the College of Education and Human Development regarding faculty resources to teach the large number of minors enrolled in their program. Such resources could take the form of a joint appointment with EDHD. In addition, the Department should offer more sections of HIST 480 in the summer to help satisfy the demand created by the minors.

The Department strongly endorses this recommendation. The amount of teaching that our faculty provides College of Education and Human Development (EDHD) students has grown exponentially since the adoption of a mandatory History minor for Integrated Social Studies majors. This has not been resourced directly and there has not been a corresponding increase in FTE instructional lines. We maintain that this has repressed the growth of our major by siphoning off potential History majors, but also the instructional demand for the mandatory HIST 480 course has stunted curriculum development/enhancement elsewhere in our undergraduate degree that could help expand the number of our majors. In the course of a discussion of curricular issues with EDHD representatives (Fiona MacKinnon, Associate Dean Student Affairs, and Barbara Henry, Academic Advisor), this issue of staffing was raised and received a warm welcome. Nothing else has eventuated however and we would like the support of the Dean of Arts and Sciences in pursuing this goal; in the form of a tenure-track position within the Department of History in education policy history, a joint appointment between the two.
Colleges, a rotating visiting professor position, or full-time instructors to teach gateway courses so as to free up tenured and tenure-track faculty to teach HIST 480 and develop other undergraduate courses attractive to EDHD students.

2. General Education Courses
Recommendations. As part of their ongoing curricular revision process, the faculty should consider whether all fifteen of the General Education courses they currently offer, particularly the upper-division courses, actually meet the objectives of the General Education program. It might be possible to meet these objectives with a smaller number of courses taught in somewhat larger sections, thereby concentrating the demand. This would increase the capacity to offer more courses to audiences of majors and minors, and allow these courses to be effectively sequenced. The Department should report progress on this to the Dean by spring semester 2005.

The Department welcomes the PRC’s finding that it is doing an “excellent job of offering General Education courses.” The observation that offering fifteen General Education courses across the undergraduate curriculum may be spreading student demand for History General Education credits across too many courses and impeding the sequencing of our upper-division courses for our majors and minors is an interesting one. We feel a decision to reallocate some of the considerable effort we put into the General Education program to a strengthening our undergraduate curriculum for our majors and minors would likely prove beneficial to our program. The Undergraduate Curriculum Committee will review this matter and report to the Department, which will develop a policy on General Education instruction by next Spring.

3. Learning Assessment
Recommendations. Assessment of the undergraduate program should continue, with annual reports to the dean’s office and the Student Achievement Assessment Committee (SAAC). The same kind of dedication should be applied to assessment of the graduate program, including the M.A. as well as the Ph.D. The faculty should consider having samples of theses and dissertations read and evaluated by external reviewers. Annual reports should be made to the deans of Arts and Sciences and the Graduate College of the extent to which master’s and doctoral students are achieving the learning objectives of the graduate program. These reports need to go beyond placement rates to assessment of the extent to which students are actually developing the skills, abilities, and knowledge stipulated in the learning outcomes.

The Graduate Committee will consider the matter of learning assessment this fall and report to the Department, which will develop procedures. Involving an external review process may prove bureaucratically cumbersome and potentially involve additional expense on a strained graduate budget. An investigation of “best practices” at other universities could form a component of the review. We would also like to know whether formal annual reports to the deans of Arts and Sciences and the Graduate College are standard practice for other departments. Is there a formal procedure of which we have not been made aware?

4. Undergraduate Curriculum
Recommendations. (a) The Department should investigate ways that history majors and minors could be introduced to methods of historical research relatively early in their programs. This introduction could take the form of either units on historical methods in lower-division courses, one or more of which would then be prerequisites for upper-division courses; or a required methods course for majors and minors that would be a prerequisite for HIST 480 and possibly other 400-level courses. HIST 480 should then be offered to students in their senior years, as a true capstone course. (b) The Department should thoroughly consider ways in which courses within given topical areas could be sequenced, offering opportunities for the accumulation of knowledge and for making connections across courses. Options should be considered and reported to the dean by spring semester 2005.
As the PRC Report notes, there is “a certain lack of organization in the curriculum for majors and minors,” which was identified in the Department Self-Study Report. That is why we built a complete review of the undergraduate curriculum into our strategic plan, beginning with the “problem” of HIST 480, already under review. We do not wish to be too precipitous with this review, as it is a major undertaking, and will proceed according to our plan.

In response to the specific recommendations: (a) The Undergraduate Curriculum Committee will investigate the best means of introducing historical research methods to our undergraduate major and minors, and work out the “confusion” with regard to HIST 480 (“a mid-career introduction to methods of historical research, or a true capstone course”), and report to the Department, which will develop a policy; and (b) The UCC will also consider and report to the Department on the sequencing of courses within topical (and perhaps period-based) subject areas to enhance the accumulation of knowledge and interconnectedness of courses.

5. Master’s Program

Recommendations. The PRC recommends an extensive review of the M.A. program, including its relationship with the Ph.D. program. The review should address the questions raised above in the findings about the master’s program, as well as other issues important to the history faculty. Results of this review should be reported to the deans of Arts and Sciences and the Graduate College by fall semester 2005.

The Department is somewhat mystified about the PRC’s finding that “the self-study provides relatively little information about the master’s program.” The sections on the Master of Arts (pp. 27-28), Managing a Two-tiered Graduate Program (p. 29), and Student Profiles (p. 32) address the program directly, while throughout the sections on graduate education the master’s degrees are brought in where relevant and the data on graduate students include masters students. That said we recognized the need to strengthen the M.A., and built into our strategic plan a review of the program. It is also clear that more thought needs to be given to the coordination of the masters and doctoral degree.

First, I will address the questions posed by the PRC:

a) We believe that it is important to maintain the “general” nature of our M.A., allowing students to pursue a variety of research subjects in history, in history paired with languages and with an education orientation, so as to insure as broad an applicant pool as possible. At the same time, we recognize the need to use our master’s degrees as a feeder to the doctoral program in policy history, inducting the best of our students into that program.

a) The PRC is mistaken in thinking that a policy history specialty at the master’s level does not exist. As found in Appendix 9.1 of the Self-Study, Guidelines And Procedures For M.A. Students, Policy History is one of the field groups in which our students can specialize, and a significant number have, in particular those that go on to the Ph.D. As to the value of a pass-through M.A.-to-Ph.D. program, this was one of the items targeted for review in our strategic plan.

a) The weight given to policy history issues in seminars varies from course to course, and should continue to do so, given our preference for maintaining the general element to the masters degree, and our students’ desire for variety in course content.

a) The master’s degree program can be structured to benefit recruitment to the Ph.D. program primarily through the adoption of a pass-through M.A., something we have been piloting informally by fast-tracking promising students through the M.A. using the examination format. The re-design of the graduate curriculum over the past two years, which has put quite a few new policy history courses on the books that we are committed to teach, we believe will also engage master’s students in policy history and entice the best to consider pursuing a Ph.D. in policy history with us.
a) The M.A.T. program is targeted for review and an interdisciplinary structure can be considered as an alternative.

a) More policy history content is to be included in the undergraduate curriculum as promised in our Self-Study. In terms of resources, graduate instruction does not negatively impact on undergraduate curriculum. If anything, the increasing demands of Q and V courses, General Education provision and instruction of EDHD students hinders our provision of a professionally acceptable graduate curriculum through the draining of teaching resources.

As to the recommendations of the PRC, the Graduate Committee will review the M.A. program, in particular its relationship with the Ph.D. program in policy history, and report to the deans of Arts and Sciences and the Graduate College by fall semester 2005.

6. Policy History Ph.D. Program

Recommendations. Efforts must be continued and expanded to attract a larger number of qualified applicants to the doctoral program. In part this must involve improvements in publicity, through the production of literature specific to the policy history emphasis, improvements to the Department’s web site (both accessibility and content), and other efforts to make potential students and their faculty advisors aware of the program, its specific nature, and its potential to lead to rewarding careers. The Department must also pursue creative ways to increase stipend levels, to ensure that we are competitive for the best students. The Department should report annually on its efforts to attract students, and the success of those efforts, to the deans of Arts and Sciences and the Graduate College.

The Department takes seriously the PRC’s recommendation that improvements need to be made in terms of publicity for the Policy History Ph.D. program. The Policy History Committee will work with the Graduate Committee on developing publicity materials, such as literature specific to the program and materials to be added to the Department’s website, as well as other strategies for enhancing the profile of Policy History within the Department. The website has already undergone significant re-design in the past year, but the final product has not been fully mounted yet. Faculty, graduate and secretarial resources will be dedicated to its complete updating this year. Finally, concerted planning will take place on strengthening the Policy History doctoral program.

The PRC also recommends that we think creatively about ways in which to increase the stipend amount for doctoral students, so as to attract better candidates. We have already in the past few years generated external funding for graduate assistantship lines, which have been utilized to increase the number of students. However, the limited resources provided for our graduate program by the Graduate College and the significant amounts of money from our Academic Challenge budget that we already commit to GA lines, all documented in the Self-Study, narrow our options. Increasing stipends from existing funds would but lessen the number of funded M.A. and Ph.D. students we would be able to support. The External Evaluators recognized there is a need of “additional graduate assistant lines, another step essential for the Department's growth.” We would ask the Dean to confer with the Dean of the Graduate College regarding the possibility of increasing the doctoral stipend for History graduate students (and hence the allocation), or of increasing the number of graduate assistantship lines granted our program. The Graduate Committee will in the next year consider ways in which to make the doctoral program more financially attractive to students.

7. Faculty Research Productivity and Workload Policy

Recommendations. The Executive Committee, with the assistance and ultimate approval of the faculty, should examine the criteria it uses to determine the appropriate balance between teaching and research for each faculty member. Tenured faculty who are not actively engaged in research projects, or less actively engaged, should have appropriately higher teaching loads. We
recognize that most faculty are active and productive in research, so this will result in a small number of additional classes. Nonetheless, these classes could be used to (a) increase the number of upper-division “topics” courses or sections of HIST 480; (b) increase the number of graduate seminars offered; or (3) selectively reduce teaching loads for other faculty members working on major research projects or grant proposals, or who are nearing consideration for tenure. The Department should report to the dean annually on the relation between research productivity and teaching load for tenured faculty members.

The PRC finds that the “Department has an excellent workload policy, in which the Executive Committee makes judgments about faculty members’ research activity and assigns reductions.” However, they would like to see a clearer statement of what constitutes research activity, and recommend that the Executive Committee further develop our policy so as to have that level of specificity. It should be stated that the expected teaching load of a Ph.D.-granting department, according to our professional body, the American Historical Association, is a 2/2 load. We have departed from that norm in cases where research activity is clearly lacking, using graduate College status as a useful guideline. The PRC recognized that we remain a very active and productive faculty, and that any changes to work load would likely be marginal. Therefore, the Executive Committee (EC) will consider and report. As to reporting annually to the Dean on the relation between research productivity and teaching load, we would like to be informed if this is a new general College policy.

8. Faculty Resources
Recommendations. The Department needs to develop a plan for future hires that specifies whether it will use such hires to fill identified gaps in coverage or to build on and expand current strengths. As part of this plan, the potential for some of the undergraduate teaching load to be covered by instructors or others on term appointments should be considered. This plan should be developed in the context of curricular reform at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. It should be submitted to the Dean of Arts and Sciences by spring semester 2005, and updated annually.

The PRC Report next addresses the perceived “gaps in our curricular coverage”, which we addressed in our Response to the External Evaluators’ Report (dated 3/17/04), while mapping out our own priorities. We had decided to build upon our strengths rather than to try to have comprehensive coverage of all historical areas of study, an objective unlikely to be realized in the present resource environment. Since that time, we have been informed that one of our faculty members (Rachel Buff) will be leaving the university as of July 1, 2004. This has led to a re-evaluation of our personnel priorities. In this year’s personnel budget request we listed as our first priority a tenure-track position in Comparative or Trans-national Race and Ethnicity History with a Policy emphasis, and as our second priority a tenure-track professorship in Peace Studies/International Security History. We are awaiting the College decision on job searches for next year. As to some sort of joint-appointment or targeted hiring to serve the interests of the Department in tandem with those of EDHD, above we have made our support clear for such an initiative. The Executive Committee will consider the departmental priorities as to instructional needs and report next spring.

9. Department Governance
Recommendations. (a) The PRC does not agree that the Executive Committee should be involved in teaching assignments; we think this would be needlessly time consuming and awkward. We suggest that the chairperson continue to assume the responsibility for making teaching assignments, and report to the faculty the degree to which junior and senior faculty (as categories, not as individuals) receive assignments in accord with their preferences. If individual faculty members feel they have been consistently assigned less desirable courses or times, the Executive Committee could serve as a mediator. (b) Service assignments for untenured faculty should be held to a minimum. Mentoring of junior faculty might be done by small (e.g., three-
person) committees, appointed by the chairperson in consultation with the junior faculty member, rather than by individuals; this minimizes the chances of ineffective mentoring due to unfortunate pairings. (c) Votes on promotion should be restricted to faculty at the targeted rank or higher; that is, only tenured associate and full professors should vote on tenure and promotion to associate, and only full professors should vote on promotion to full. (d) The roles of the Executive Committee and the Curriculum Committee should be examined and codified, with a report to the dean by fall semester 2005.

We will address the PRC’s recommendations one by one:

a) The model planned by the Executive Committee for scheduling would not necessarily prove as time consuming as the PRC imagines. In fact, we piloted the process in the Fall 2004 scheduling exercise, and found it to work well. The Chair generates a rough schedule and circulates to the Committee for its input and advice, following which a final schedule is developed and faculty notified of their assignments. Faculty still have recourse to appeal to the Executive Committee if they have a grievance they would like to air. We would like to utilize this model at least for the coming year to see if it addresses some of the problems identified in Program Review.

b) The Department has already decided to limit the service responsibilities of junior faculty, privileging departmental over college/university commitments in most cases. We will consider the mentoring of junior faculty by small (e.g., three-person) committees, although this will soon be a moot issue, given that all faculty will have gone through the tenure review process in the next two years.

c) We agreed to rewrite our policies to insure that votes on promotion will be restricted to faculty at the targeted rank or higher. As to the clarity (or ambiguity) of criteria for promotion, which the Program Review Committee feel are sufficiently clear and adequate, the Department would still like some clarification. The PRC react against “overly rigid, ‘objectified’ standards for promotion and tenure often,” but we have been made to abide by such standards (a book for tenure, two books for promotion to full professor), even though they have not been codified, and, in one instance, were maintained against the unanimous recommendation of the full professors within the Department. We would like to know whether other departments are being held to the same unwritten standards.

d) The respective roles of the Executive Committee and the Curriculum Committee are already laid out in our guidelines. The Executive Committee will re-visit and re-write where deemed necessary, and report to the Department. Departmental decisions will be relayed to the Dean by fall semester 2005.

Let me conclude by expressing my thanks to the PRC for all the work they did in reviewing our materials and the External Evaluators’ Report, meeting with the faculty of our Department, and in drafting this report. Their insights, no doubt, will prove most helpful to departmental growth. We also look forward to the next stage in this process, our consultation with the Dean of Arts and Sciences.