

**Department of History**  
**College of Arts and Sciences**  
**Western Carolina University**  
**External Review Report**

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**Introduction**

The review team's visit occurred March 25-27, 2012, during which time the team members met with the following people: Beth Tyson Lofquist (Interim Provost), Gibbs Knotts (Interim Dean, College of Arts and Sciences), Richard Starnes (Department Head), Alexander Macaulay (Graduate Program Coordinator), ten History students (4 undergraduates, 6 graduate students), 9 History faculty, Kate Greysen (Associate Dean, Graduate School), Becky Kornegay (History Library Liason), Melissa Wargo (Assistant Vice Chancellor, Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness), and David Onder (Assessment Coordinator).

In advance of the review, Mr. Onder provided the team with appropriate documentation related to the Department of History, including the WCU Academic Program Review Handbook for the External Reviewer, the 2011-2012 Department of History Self-Study, the 2011-2012 Department of History Response to Program Review Standards, the 2007-2008 Department of History Annual Assessment Report, updated faculty vitae, and current course syllabi. At the reviewers' request, the Department Head and Library Liason provided additional information regarding the department's alumni employment and Hunter Library's serial subscription list.

**General Assessment of the Department of History**

WCU's history department clearly shines as one of the jewels of the College of Arts and Sciences and the university as a whole. It is headed by a dedicated and able administrator/historian and its graduate program has made great strides under an extremely effective program coordinator. The administrative, office, and teaching facilities are at least adequate; above average for a state institution. The department's 15 faculty, 2 of whom do not teach in the department, are amazingly productive as researchers, exhibit first-class teaching, and perform exemplary service to North Carolina, North Carolina's western mountain region, and the university. The placement of M.A. graduates in Ph.D. programs is admirable; comparable to larger and better-known History departments throughout North Carolina.

Despite these commendable points, WCU's historians labor under serious restrictions, including minimal research support, a relatively heavy teaching load (3 courses per semester) considering

promotion expectations, and with research facilities that, while generally adequate, fall below those afforded by leading university-level research libraries.

The department offers 6 degrees, although the B.A., B.S., and M.A. degree programs are the focus of this review. Program specialty areas include the U.S., Europe, Appalachia, Native Americans, and Latin America. In 2011-12 the department had 278 undergraduate majors and 34 graduate students, the latter figure reflecting significant gains over the last five years.

### **Summary of Department Strengths**

#### **Faculty:**

- Well-trained as professional historians;
- Deeply committed to student learning and success in History, in Liberal Studies, and in ways that support the University's QEP;
- Fully engaged in scholarship – locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally – that integrates traditional research dissemination with pedagogy and academic outreach in the best traditions of the teacher-scholar model;
- Held to high standards of promotion and tenure (one monograph for promotion to associate professor; a second monograph for promotion to professor);
- Reflects diversity of “race” and gender; and
- Provides conscientious and high quality student recruiting and advising.

#### **Faculty Collaboration:**

- Works closely with the College of Education to integrate teaching degree programs in Social Studies;
- Maintains close contact with public schools throughout the western counties of North Carolina;
- Supports programs with the university's Mountain Heritage Center and the Coulter Faculty Commons;
- Sends graduate students in Public History as interns to cultural institutions, including national sites, repositories, and museums;
- Receives very strong support from Library Liaison for History Collections; and
- Encourages interdisciplinary programs with anthropology and other social science programs at the university.

#### **Curriculum:**

- Reflects a careful, developmentally-framed structure attuned to knowledge and skill acquisition;

- Includes depth and breadth of courses;
- Emphasizes applied and practical pedagogy through experiential learning;
- Reflects a high degree of academic rigor;
- Allows students to make adequate progress to degree;
- Includes undergraduate “exit interviews” to provide feedback regarding staffing and curricular concerns;
- Requires comprehensive examinations for all graduate students, including those concentrating in Public History and those submitting theses;
- Prepares undergraduates for a broad range of careers as teachers, lawyers, bankers, as well as in government service and business; and
- Prepares graduate students for teaching and public service as well as for doctoral programs.

### **Summary of Department Areas Needing Improvement**

#### **Faculty:**

- Understaffed in European, Middle Eastern, World, and Public History;
- Reflects too large of a student to faculty ratio, particularly at the undergraduate level;
- Functions under severely inadequate financial research support by the university – a weakness that undercuts not only productivity, but also morale;
- Depends on piecemeal, haphazard funding for research and conference travel;
- Operates under inadequate support for course-related engagement activities and Public History projects;
- Relies on computer equipment that is not updated on a reasonably regular basis; and
- Lacks senior leadership (only one professor on staff).

#### **Curriculum:**

- Offers very few “graduate only” (i.e., non- “split level”) classes; and
- Offers overly large classes that are not conducive to the instructional style valued by the department;

#### **Program Support:**

- Requires significantly larger library allotment for monographs; and
- Requires more graduate assistantships to assist with faculty teaching and research and to recruit and retain quality graduate students.

## **Recommendations**

### **Faculty**

- Provide at least two new faculty lines to replace the two lines reverted due to recent personnel changes;
- Provide additional faculty lines in European and Public History to cover curriculum gaps in these areas;
- Raise faculty salaries commensurate with peer institutions;
- Remedy salary compression in the department;
- Provide systematic reassignment of duties leave to support research;
- Improve basic levels of conference travel and research support in the department budget especially, but also in the college and university budgets;
- Pursue external funding opportunities; and
- Reduce teaching load in lieu of lowering promotion standards; some examples include linking teaching load to productivity level, increasing the number of GAs who assist faculty with their courses, and using highly qualified GAs who have completed their program requirements as instructors of record.

### **Curriculum Development**

- Eliminate or significantly reduce the number of “split level” courses;
- Increase the number of graduate course offerings;
- Offer Public History courses on a regular rotation schedule;
- Increase the number of non-Western courses required for the undergraduate major;
- Expand the Public History specialty to build upon success in placement;
- Improve recruiting and placing of graduate students;
- Add a faculty member to teach Documentary Studies;
- Develop closer institutional ties with the Mountain Heritage Center; and
- Investigate institutional ties with the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching.

### **Program Support**

- Increase student awareness and understanding of available resources (for example, library resources) by promoting them during orientation and/or Advising Day;
- Provide additional graduate assistantships;
- Provide an additional one-to-two graduate fellowships dedicated specifically to the Mountain Heritage Center;

- Provide “fifth semester” funding to highly qualified graduate students who have completed their program requirements so they may gain marketable teaching experience, while at the same time lightening faculty teaching load;
- Provide better facilitation of university resources for faculty research and travel in place of the current “piecemeal” system;
- Provide university resources equally to faculty, regardless of tenure status (for example, scholarly leave);
- Provide start-up money for junior faculty research; and
- Remedy library deficiencies, such as the deficient monograph collection, and depend less on the “ABC” system.

### **Conclusion**

The reviewers found the Department of History among the best at WCU. Collectively the faculty produces a considerable volume of scholarship, teaches creatively and conscientiously, and serves the state and region with distinction. The Department of History clearly exceeds the university’s mission.

From the perspective of the external reviewer, despite its obvious strengths, the department continues to suffer from a demoralizing and inconsistent leadership at the College and University levels. One could only imagine what its members might accomplish in terms of research, teaching, and service, if provided with a modicum of institutional stability and financial support. Regrettably, external reviewers reached the same conclusions regarding financial matters in reports prepared in 2000 and 2006, yet the problems remain unsolved.