

External Review Report Department of History, Utah State University

Beginning the evening of Sunday, April 7, 2002, and continuing to the end of the working day on Tuesday, April 9, a team of three external reviewers and one internal Utah State University faculty member completed an on site examination of the University's Department of History. Before its arrival, this review panel studied the Department's Self Study document. During its on site visit, the panel met with University and College administrators, the Department Chair, individual faculty members, and both undergraduate and graduate students currently enrolled in the Utah State University history program.

In general, the review panel wishes to state its high regard for the professional standing of the department faculty, for the faculty's commitment to teaching—in general education, in the history major, and in the department's masters level programs—and for the breadth of scholarly excellence the department embodies. In its faculty ranks we found senior scholars with international reputations, junior scholars of great promise, energy, and dedication, committed teachers, and thoroughly devoted "citizens" of the University.

At the same time, the panel was struck by the fact that this department—whose reputation for graduate training and faculty scholarship is known nationally—is as small as it is. Given Utah State University's stature as its state's land grant institution and its status as a Carnegie top tier research university, we had expected that its Department of History would be, at least, 15% to 25% larger (that is, 18-to-20 full time faculty rather than 15).

1. Departmental Description

a) Major Programs of study in the Department

The Department of History provides a comprehensive undergraduate baccalaureate program in history, as well as a History Minor, History Teaching Major and Minor, and specialized minors in Classical Civilization, Classical Civilization with Latin emphasis, Classical Civilization with Greek emphasis, and History and Teaching.

At the graduate level, the department offers the M.A. and M.S. (the former requiring foreign language proficiency, the latter computer science and/or statistics proficiencies) with thesis and non-thesis options. The non-thesis option requires submission to an examining committee of two seminar papers and an independent research paper thirty-to-forty pages in length. In addition, the Department of History offers a Master of Social Science degree with an emphasis in history that is focused on the continuing education needs of secondary school teachers.

b) Size of department in terms of students and staff

The (budgeted) department faculty FTE is currently less than fifteen. Its members' expertise includes African history, English history (with experts in the early modern and modern periods), Continental European history, Classics and Ancient history, Russia and China, Eastern European and Ottoman history, and Early American/United States history

(with experts in Early American/Revolutionary history, Western American and regional history, African-American and Southern history, Women's history, Indian history, twentieth century U.S., environmental history, and Diplomatic history). In addition, two experts in Folklore are associated with the department. A number of adjunct faculty enhance department offerings with courses in public history and the history of technology.

The Department of History currently has about 210 undergraduate majors; appropriately, about 25% have graduated annually in recent years. The ratio of majors to faculty is approximately 15:1, a substantial advising load, especially when graduate students are included (8(+):1), for a composite student-faculty ratio of more than 23:1. The classroom student-faculty ratio is stratospheric, 153:1, a result of the great demand on this campus for history courses and, especially, the disproportionate (to resources) role that history faculty play in the University's general education program. It is clear that the history department teaching load—in terms of the classroom ratio of students to faculty—is burdensome, with potentially negative effects on the teaching and research objectives of the department and the university. In this regard, a significant cost is borne by undergraduate history majors and graduate history students.

c) The Role and History of the Department

The department is deeply involved in (a) the University's general education program—providing instruction far out of proportion to its size; (b) the undergraduate history major and its classics/ancient history and history teaching minor; (c) graduate, masters level, training in history.

d) Special Facilities or Activities Managed by the Department

Among Department activities—related to but going beyond its formal teaching mission—are its encouragement, support, and funding of student research and conference participation. In the past year, seven USU history students have presented papers at regional and national conferences—and a number of history students have won scholarly prizes for their work. While this department support may seem a small gesture, members of the review panel are keenly aware of how department sponsorship and support of students affects student interest in their studies, student connections and loyalty to their undergraduate and graduate institution, and—beyond the university walls—the very reputation of the department and university. The department is to be congratulated. In this it deserves the support of the university administration.

The Department's most visible and distinguished scholarly symbol is its sponsorship of the editorial office of the *Western Historical Quarterly*, a premier scholarly journal in United States history. The *Quarterly* offers two editorial fellowships to graduate students. Recipients of these fellowships—and of editorial internships that are open generally to graduate students—learn the full range of editorial skills, participate directly in the scholarly life of their discipline, and establish working relationships with scholars throughout the United States. As such, the presence of the *WHQ* editorial office raises the profile of Utah State University among faculty, administrators, and students throughout the United States. It helps USU to recruit outstanding graduate students. Many alumni of the *WHQ* editorial assistant program have gone on to distinguished doctoral programs and, in turn, faculty positions across the United States.

The Department is also the editorial home of *Ploutarchos*, the highly respected journal of the International Plutarch Society, a major resource for ancient historians worldwide. The editor, Professor Frances Titchener, also maintains the Society's web page.

2. Review Activities

The external committee for the 2002 review of the History Department consisted of the following individuals:

- Ann Marie Berghout Austin, Professor of Child Development and Associate Dean for Undergraduate Academic Affairs, College of Family Life, Utah State University
- Richard A. Cosgrove, University Distinguished Professor of History and Head, Department of History, University of Arizona
- William K. Friert, Professor and Chair of Classics, Gustavus Adolphus College
- David A. Johnson, Professor of History, Portland State University and Managing Editor, *Pacific Historical Review*.

Prior to arrival on the Utah State University campus the committee received the informative Self Study that the Department of History had prepared. This provided the factual foundation for evaluation of the department.

When the campus visit commenced, the committee had a full schedule over two days to gather additional information about the department. These included meetings with campus administrators Elizabeth Grobsmith, Dean of the College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, Thomas Kent, Dean of the Graduate College, and Deanna D. Winn, Vice Provost and Director of Accreditation. A scheduled meeting with Provost Stan Albrecht was cancelled because of the Provost's illness.

In addition, members of the committee met individually and collectively with the faculty. This included phone calls to faculty members who were away from Logan. The committee also had ample opportunity to meet with Department Chair Norman Jones. The committee had the same sequence of individual and collective meetings with the classicists who teach in the department. The committee believes that faculty had the chance to meet with committee as much or as little as each individual preferred.

3. Evaluation Criteria

a) Mission and Goals

The Department of History's mission to train undergraduates to research, analyze, synthesize, and communicate accurate conclusions about change over time using historical methods is admirably met through its contributions to the general education of undergraduates (far exceeding the University norm, especially in supplying state-mandated courses), as well as through its impressive training of master's level history students and undergraduates in History, History Teaching, and Classics. In addition, the Department fulfills its obligations to the University's land-grant mission by a variety of

extension activities. Finally, the professional quality of the scholarship of its faculty makes it nearly unique among History departments that do not grant a Ph.D.

b) Program Effectiveness

The Department has successfully completed the transition to a semester system, the development of its compact plan, and its self-study for this Regents' Review, producing a coherent sequence of rigorous courses to achieve its mission. The Department's approach emphasizes critical thinking, analysis, and writing rather than memorization of data. It trains students for life-long learning, no matter what careers they pursue. It has developed appropriate assessment methods and responds to needs as they are discovered. Because it is understaffed, it lacks breadth in Latin American and Asian history.

c) Students

The remarkable teaching and leadership of the History Department's faculty attracts far more students than can be adequately served. The students who major and minor in the Department are of high quality, both because enthusiastic teaching attracts serious students and because rigorous standards attract students who appreciate being challenged. The students we met were very appreciative of the education they are receiving, lavish in their praise of their faculty mentors, and energetic in their support of department activities.

d) Faculty

The Faculty members of the Department of History are remarkably qualified. Among them they cover nearly forty areas of their disciplines, edit two important academic journals, and have been responsible for the publication of over forty books and a hundred scholarly articles. Despite this prodigious output, they have somehow found time to serve USU as part-time administrators and members of major University committees in alarming numbers. Their devotion has been rewarded with three dozen major service or teaching awards. Despite the scarcity of outside funding for the humanistic disciplines in general, this department has garnered thirty grants of one kind or another. The Department's assessment procedures are realistic, effective, and regularized.

e) Administration

The creativity of the leadership of the History Department is enviable. The challenge of gross underfunding of the department is met by a combination of success at securing grants, sabbatical residues, and ingenious maneuvering. The Department has developed impressive short- and long-range plans and is already undertaking initiatives for future growth.

f) Resources and Facilities

The Department is appropriately quartered in well-appointed and efficient offices. Technological support seems adequate and the students indicate that the gross inadequacy of library holdings is being offset, to some extent, by on-line research tools and by periodic trips to better-endowed university libraries.

4. Summary: Departmental Strengths and Weaknesses

a) Strengths

It is not an exaggeration to assert that the History Department sets the standard of scholarship for the rest of the academic community at Utah State University. The department is an outstanding example of the way one unit has excelled at every aspect of the land-grant mission of teaching, research, and engagement. History faculty members are admired for their research and for their many contributions to the overall body of knowledge. In addition to setting high standards for every other department, History also contributes immeasurably to the collective environment of scholarship at USU. History faculty research is regularly presented at campus-wide seminars that are well attended by colleagues from a wide range of disciplines. The department also sponsors, regularly, public lectures and symposia that bring noted scholars to campus.

Admired for their fine example as teachers, faculty members give careful attention to student development and, even in large classes, spend a remarkable amount of time mentoring each student individually. It is well known across the Utah State campus that the History Department defines the cutting edge in terms of effectively engaging students in learning. As Dr. Norman Jones writes in the department self-assessment prepared for this review, "Six of the faculty have been honored as Teacher of the Year in the College, and two have won national recognition as Carnegie Endowment CASE Professor of the Year for Utah. Beyond that, the Department's teaching evaluation scores are consistently higher than those of the College and the University as a whole" (Standard 1 p. 9).

Faculty members in History discuss teaching and assessment strategies with each other regularly. They support each other in the implementation of innovative techniques. The department utilizes a multi-method, multi-trait plan for assessing students' perceptions of their experiences in history classes. Coupled with this are systematic exit surveys and exit interviews. Each year the department discusses the results of these surveys and interviews at an annual assessment meeting and "each year we change the curriculum in small ways, attempting to address important issues" (Standard 2.A p. 21).

A unique strength of the Utah State History Department is its emphasis on ancient history and Classics. Through remarkably astute recruiting, the department boasts a Classics faculty that rivals those of highly selective, nationally prominent liberal arts colleges. No other Classics program in the world can boast that every member of its faculty has won a major teaching award. In addition to star-quality teaching, the classicists excel as scholars, in service to the University (especially in teaching overloads), and in interdisciplinary activity. Their new initiative in collaboration with other Utah classicists to establish a chapter of the national student classics organization and their planned initiative to create a Latin teaching minor are examples of the continuing leadership of this remarkably energetic group of core faculty.

The presence of the *Western Historical Quarterly* editorial offices within the department of history places the department—indeed the University—in the scholarly limelight. As noted above, this program recruits outstanding graduate students to the campus, is key to the successful placement of USU history graduate students in outstanding Ph.D. programs,

serves among academic historians to mark the Utah State University history department as an outstanding research department, and models—for all undergraduate students who come into contact with the journal—the values, skills, and processes of scholarship. Among historians of the United States it is fair to say that the *Western Historical Quarterly* defines—positively—the reputation of Utah State University.

b) Weaknesses

As Dr. Jones states in the department's self-study, History's remarkable strengths, in large part, have also brought about their weaknesses. Because the faculty in this department value teaching as scholarship and understand their impact on students, adjuncts and graduate students are not used to teach history classes. Additionally, History plays a large service role in Utah State's general education program. With a student/faculty ratio of 153:1, history continually fights "to preserve good teaching in the face of high enrollment demand" (standard 1 p. 11).

History is understaffed in terms of coverage of content. There is a serious need for a Latin American scholar and an additional scholar in South Asian studies to round out course offerings. Additionally, the department needs "more people to teach world history, American history, and European history if [the department is] to provide the coverage demanded by the students. This is especially an issue for the Teaching History program, since we must prepare people to teach World Civilizations and American history in a global context, but we often can supply no more than one course in non-American, non-European history a term to meet that demand. This is compounded by the recent decision of Secondary Education to require a History minor of all Social Studies Teaching majors (standard 1 p. 11)".

5. Recommendations for Specific Changes

The committee recommends that the University recognize the overall excellence that the department has already achieved. The University has a simple choice, even in this era of complex budgetary considerations. The excellence of the department may be maintained, or it may decline though indifference or neglect. The committee recommends strongly that the University choose to maintain and augment a department whose teaching excellence is unquestioned and whose research accomplishments are substantial.

- a) As soon as the budget permits, the University should restore the line in Latin American history to the department. The committee urges that the research specialization of this line should be in modern Mexican history. Three reasons dictate this conclusion. First, the state of Utah has mandated the teaching of global history in secondary schools and, without this faculty line, the department cannot fulfill this command. Global history cannot exist without an instructor in the history of the territory from the northern border of Mexico to the southern tip of South America. Second, the University should become proactive in this area because of the rapidly growing number of Hispanic residents in the state of Utah. The University should prepare now for increasing numbers of Hispanic students to arrive. Third, the department should not suffer because it did the right thing in the non-retention of a faculty member who did not meet its standards. This sends a bad

signal to the rest of the University, for it indicates that a department that does the right thing receives treatment that can be construed as punitive.

- b) With respect to the future of the *Western History Quarterly*, if there should be fundamental changes in the makeup of the editorial team in the near future, the committee recommends that appropriate hirings take place to ensure the quality of the journal. The *WHQ* is the premier journal in the field of western American history and every effort should be made to maintain that position. The journal brings a high level of scholarly visibility to the University and to the department. We recommend that the University do everything possible to preclude the transfer of the journal away from Utah State University.
- c) In order for the department to meet the obligations undertaken in the Compact Plan, the committee recommends that the University prepare to add new lines to the department. At 15 the department is perilously small compared to peer institutions. The more appropriate size would be 18-20 members. This would permit the department to continue its quality work; without growth the capacity to maintain excellence is in doubt.
- d) Finally, we recommend that the University do whatever is necessary to assist the department in securing endowments for two professorships in the history of religion. Not only would this allow a partial solution to the problem of lines for the department, but it would bring senior scholars who would add to the scholarly reputation of the department.

6. Additional Information

- a) **What is the state of the art in this discipline, and how well is it reflected in the department? How do the goals of the department compare to those of the rest of the profession?**

There is no single "state of the art" relevant to evaluating a single department of history, for history departments vary dramatically in terms of size, program, and mission. This said, the Utah State University history department is marked by a faculty of active and recognized scholars in their specific sub-fields, as witnessed by the reputations of individual faculty and the inventory of awards, grants and contracts garnered by the department collectively. As editorial home of the *Western Historical Quarterly*, the department participates directly in the very definition of what the "state of the art" is in this prominent sub-field of United States (and, more generally, North American) history.

- b) **What should be the roles of this department in the university? Is it successfully fulfilling these roles?**

Perhaps the strongest element of the department is its sense of self. It does not lust after a doctoral program. The various Master's programs that it offers are well suited to the size of the department and the library holdings. It has a strong commitment to teaching excellence at all levels, from general education to the graduate program. The History Department at Utah State is an ornament to the university that ought to receive adequate support to permit it to maintain these activities. Failure to do so will inevitably result in an atrophy of the department's reputation.

c) **How does the quality of this department compare with departments elsewhere in the areas of teaching, scholarship, students, and outreach?**

While a small department for a university of this size, both the Department Self Study and our interviews/discussions with university and college administrators, the department chair, department faculty, and undergraduate and graduate students underscored the high quality—and the impressive extent and range—of teaching, faculty research and publication, student performance, and the department's community presence.

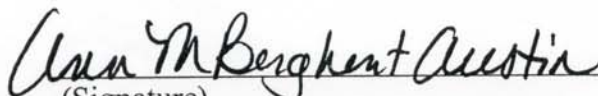
d) **Given the resources at hand, are they being effectively used?**

Our review of this issue was necessarily limited. However, based on information in the Department Self Study and discussions with university and college administration, the department chair, and department faculty, we are of the opinion that the department is extraordinarily effective in identifying sources of funding and in utilizing its funds in the interest of student learning and faculty teaching and professional development.

e) **Provide recommendations concerning the direction the department should take if:**

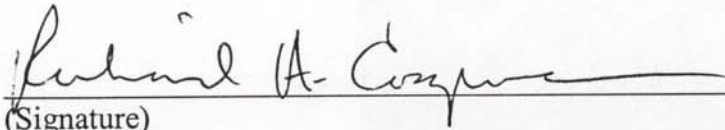
1. Resources Remain Constant: If resources remain constant, no doubt the department will continue to muddle through. If this results in an ever-increasing student-faculty ratio, then department members might be forced to forego some of their scholarly work, which will in turn affect negatively the department's/university's standing as a research institution and, in perhaps less visible but no less significant ways, the undergraduate and graduate teaching function of the department and university as well. The department cannot function as a service department for long without diminution of its scholarly productivity and a general loss of morale.
2. Additional Resources Become Available: If additional resources become available, the department should maintain and expand on the excellence it now possesses: expand the graduate program to 18 new students per year, retain the existing excellence of the *Western History Quarterly*, and hire in the areas for global history as outlined in the Compact Plan. The increase in the size of the department will let the department continue to teach an equitable share of general education students.
3. Resources are Decreased: If resources are decreased, the faculty will still try their best in the areas of teaching, research, and service. In the case of decreased resources, the review panel concludes that the department will be forced to consider a combination of actions that are clearly opposed to the mission of the university; for example, place severe caps on enrollments in general education courses, reduce its graduate program, abandon its tradition of scholarly excellence (which, in the case of the History Department, is a defining mark of Utah State University), or prepare for the loss of the *Western Historical Quarterly*.

Signatures:


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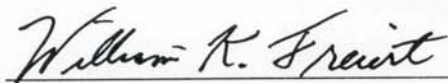
Ann Marie Berghout Austin, Professor of Child Development and Associate Dean for Undergraduate Academic Affairs, College of Family Life, Utah State University



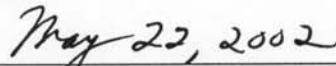
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Richard A. Cosgrove, University Distinguished Professor of History and Department Head,
University of Arizona

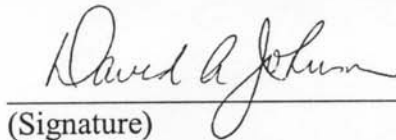


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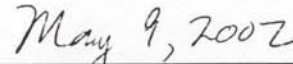


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(Signature)



(Date)

David A. Johnson, Professor of History, Portland State University and Managing Editor,
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