

Florida Atlantic University
Department of History
Program Review
March 14-15, 2019

Review Team:
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OVERVIEW

This report provides the findings of the review team, Dr. Laura Belmonte, Dr. Charles Bolton, and Dr. Laura Vernon, on FAU's Department of History. The findings are based on a review of the Department's self-study document, web materials, and a site visit on March 14th and 15th, 2019. The team met with:

- Department faculty
- Russell Ivy, Senior Associate Provost
- Karin Scarpinato, Associate Vice President for Research
- Khaled Sobhan, Dean of the Graduate College
- Douglas Kanter, Director of Graduate Studies Program for History
- Ben Lowe, Chair of the History Department
- Ed Pratt, Dean of Undergraduate Studies
- Eric Hanne, Director of Undergraduate Studies Program for History
- Dr. Michael Horswell, Dean of the College of Arts and Letters
- Graduate and undergraduate students

Our visit was well organized, highly informative, and enjoyable. We appreciated the wide range of stakeholders we could speak with as part of the process.

Strengths of the Department

Overall, the Department has a strong and collegial collection of teacher/scholars, as evidenced by the numerous teaching awards received by the faculty and the quantity and quality of faculty publications. Two members of the faculty are Fellows of the Royal Historical Society, an elected position and the most prestigious historical organization in the United Kingdom. An associate professor in the Department won the 2019 Stuart L. Bernath Lecture Prize awarded by the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations. The Department's Civil War historian has won numerous awards and competitive fellowships for his scholarly work. The Department produces, on average, three monographs a year, publishes approximately twenty-five other publications, and makes almost thirty presentations at scholarly conferences. This level of productivity and quality is commensurate with History programs with doctoral programs and with significantly lower teaching loads.

Conversations with students confirm that the History faculty are passionate about their instructional responsibilities. Students describe the faculty as committed to hands-on learning, highly accessible and willing to provide individualized attention to students, and providers of excellent mentoring. The Department does an exceptional job of promoting undergraduate research, especially in its upper-division courses and seminars. An increasing number of undergraduate students pursue the option of completing a senior honors thesis. Several students have had their research published in the Florida Atlantic University Undergraduate Research Journal, and recently, one student had an article published in the peer-reviewed *Florida Historical Quarterly*. The Department also has a strong reputation for placement of its undergraduate students in competitive History MA programs and its MA students in some of the nation's top History Ph.D. programs, including Harvard University. The Department does a nice job of promoting its programs, faculty, and students through its website and a host of innovative promotional materials

The History Department plays a vital role in supporting various University priorities and initiatives. To begin with, the Department makes a major contribution to the institution's general education curriculum--the Intellectual Foundations Program. History faculty teach one of the few non-English Department offerings for the second foundational writing course students must take: Writing History. In addition, the Department has two courses each in both the Foundations of Society and Human Behavior and the Foundations in Global Citizenship categories. The Department also plays a key role in helping students fulfill the state of Florida's mandate for a Civic Literacy requirement, providing one of the two courses, U.S. History Since 1877, that students can take to meet this requirement. The Department contributes to the University's Strategic Plan where it can, primarily by contributing to the Plan's Platforms. One of the Department's faculty members is associate director of the Peace, Justice, and Human Rights initiative, while another faculty member heads up the South Florida Culture platform. In addition, two of the Department faculty are affiliates of the Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute (HBOI).

The Department also makes an important and sustained contribution to the University value of community engagement. Despite only having one faculty member dedicated to the sub-specialty of public history (though a second person will join the faculty next fall), the department has built an impressive internship program, with partnerships with more than a dozen museums and other cultural institutions. The Department also hosts two annual events that bring world-renowned scholars and public intellectuals to campus: The Alan B. and Charna Larkin Symposium on the American Presidency and The John O'Sullivan Memorial Lecture. Recent participants in these events include noted presidential scholar Michael Beschloss, award-winning author David McCullough, celebrated journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, and former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright. In addition, the faculty of the History Department frequently speak to a variety of local groups about a range of relevant historical topics.

Challenges/Threats Faced by the Department

Many of the challenges faced by the Department are related to state and institutional priorities that limit their access to adequate resources. It is difficult for the Department to align well with the University's strategic plan, and thereby, make a claim on new resources. The four Pillars that constitute the heart of the University's Strategic Plan are all STEM-oriented, which precludes participation by the Department

of History in these objectives. As noted above, the Department contributes in various ways to the Platforms of the Strategic Plan, but these objectives come with little or no funding. A recent mandate by the state of Florida for a Civic Literacy requirement involves significant teaching capacity of the Department but came with no additional resources.

Other resource issues include a stagnant rate for graduate stipends for the MA program. Although there was a recent small increase of MA stipends to \$4,500 per semester, that rate is still below that of comparable programs, especially considering that FAU is the only public institution in the state that does not provide health insurance for those with graduate assistantships and that neither the local area nor the University provides affordable housing for graduate students. While the department has managed to still attract quality candidates to its MA program, it consistently fails to land its top applicants because its assistantship offers are not competitive.

While the History Department has assembled a strong group of faculty, the Department faces issues related to retaining faculty. The Department Chair is experienced and dedicated, but risks burning himself out if he continues to attend every department committee meeting. The Undergraduate Program Director and Graduate Program Director are gaining important leadership experience and the Department faculty would benefit from additional opportunities to build their leadership skills more broadly and explore potential succession plans. The Department has lost six faculty to other institutions since its last program review, including an assistant professor who will be leaving for Emory University at the end of this academic year. Humanities scholars need time without other responsibilities to advance their research projects. Although the Dean of the College of Arts and Letters has developed some programs to provide College faculty with competitive research funds and some release time from full-time teaching, full research sabbaticals are often difficult to obtain, since decisions are made centrally, rather than at the College level (even though the College provides the resources to allow faculty to take full research sabbaticals). The Department and College also seem to have limited ability to accommodate spousal hires, make counter-hires, and increase salaries for retention purposes, strategies typically used to retain faculty. While the tight job market for historians has allowed the Department to replace departing faculty with quality junior teachers/scholars, there are costs, both in terms of real funding and in terms of Department stability, associated with the failure to retain top faculty. Furthermore, based on discussions with faculty, there appear to be significant disparities in the allocation of departmental service obligations and promotional trajectories. A small bloc of faculty carry onerous service burdens while others perform little to no service. More seriously, a number of Associate Professors have been so burdened with service and teaching that it has hindered their ability to produce the scholarship required for promotion to Full Professor. A few Associate Professors, even those who have met the research standards for the department, have made numerous failed attempts before securing promotion. We recommend a serious evaluation of possible workload inequities, mentoring, and possible bias in service duty allocations and promotions.

Like other History departments nationwide, the one at FAU has also had to contend with a decline in the number of students majoring in History since the Great Recession of 2008. While we offer some recommendations to address this ongoing problem below, we also note that the History Department at FAU faces some unique obstacles. Most important, the fact that student advising is centralized for the first forty-five hours of a student's career--combined with the pressure of the state metric of maintaining a high four-year graduation rate--means that students interested in History might not always be directed to the History major, which is primarily a major of discovery. Few students come out of high school wanting to study the discipline; most are attracted to the importance and value of a History degree after

taking an introductory course. Professional advisors may not always encourage this budding interest, especially if the key objective is to stay on track with an original plan of study to finish in four years. The FAU History Department has also tried to promote a Student History Club to build a sense of community among History majors (and perhaps entice new students to major in History), but these efforts also face some institutional obstacles: onerous training for officers of student clubs and bureaucratic and time-consuming procedures associated with student event planning.

The Department's infrastructure is dated and inadequate. While parts of campus have lavish new buildings, History contends with broken furniture, noise issues, and severe limitations of space that inhibit both teaching and student activities. Inadequate support for the University Library may also be an obstacle to attracting and retaining research-active faculty. The Library is essentially the lab for Humanities scholars, yet the Library's budget has remained stagnant for more than a decade, even as the costs for electronic resources and journals has increased. While some important materials in these areas have been eliminated, the Library has not been able to purchase any History books for the last two years.

Progress on Recommendations from Previous Program Review

The Department had five recommendations from the previous Program Review:

1. *Recover two tenure-track lines that had not been replaced.* One of those lines was replaced during the current academic year, but the second line has not been replaced.
2. *Conduct a curriculum review at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.* Such a review was undertaken, which led to several changes, including the creation of Flight Plans to better track undergraduate student progress; the development of the Writing History course for the FAU general education program; and the creation of a 4+1 accelerated MA degree, which allows students to earn a BA and an MA in History in five years. Department faculty told us that several curriculum issues remain, and the Department plans to conduct another review of its curriculum. We endorse that effort and offer some recommendations below for that process.
3. *Study whether the History major should continue to be offered on the Davie and Jupiter campuses.* The major at Davie has been phased out, while a decision on the Jupiter campus is still pending, subject to recent changes underway at that location. Putting the Jupiter campus decision on hold is deemed appropriate. Future History offerings on the Jupiter campus will be affected by overall campus enrollment, curricular coordination with the Wilkes Honors College, and campus infrastructure, including frequency and evening runs of intercampus shuttles.
4. *Study enrollment caps for undergraduate History courses.* This study was conducted, and enrollment caps were adjusted for all levels of History courses in the undergraduate curriculum.
5. *Study graduation rates to determine how to increase these rates for History majors.* We did not learn the results of that study, but the 4-year graduation rate for the Department seems to have improved overall since the last Program Review. In 2013-2014 and 2014-2015, the rate was 26.1%, which had increased to 30.3 % in 2016-2017 and 44.4% in the 2016-2017 academic year, well above the overall College rate of 35.4% in 2016-2017. While the Department's four-year graduation rate dipped to 18.2% last year (2017-2018), it is unclear if that number is an anomaly or not, as large fluctuations can occur when the sample size is relatively small.

Recommendations Concerning Program Goals Discussed in the Self-Study

1. *Develop a pre-Law track in the major.* We endorse this move. The Self-Study lays out a number of good reasons for developing such a track in the major, and as noted, this strategy can be easily accomplished. Such a track may also help attract new students to the major.
2. *Develop more public history initiatives.* We would also endorse this action and would encourage the Department to consider all the ways it might introduce public history as a more intentional part of the undergraduate and/or graduate curriculum, especially since a second dedicated public history scholar will be joining the faculty in the fall. The Department already has a well-developed internship program and has applied for an NEH Challenge Grant to establish a digital History lab. The Department should also consider applying for a FAU Technology Fee Grant to further support the digital History lab. In addition to the creation of a graduate Public History Certificate mentioned in the Self-Study, the Department might also consider creating an undergraduate track in Public History, which might be an additional strategy for attracting new majors. In addition to the (soon) two faculty who specialize in Public History, the Department should explore whether other faculty could contribute in some way to such a track. There has been an effort among the History faculty to develop a Florida aerospace museum that draws in part on the World War II-era structures on campus. In the Self-Study, the Department mentions the possibility of searching for external funding to bring this idea to fruition. We would endorse that strategy, as such a museum could further enhance Public History offerings at FAU. The Department could also utilize its contacts at its internship sites to recruit adjunct faculty who might be able to provide other course offerings in the Public History area beyond the expertise of the current faculty.
3. *Promote greater student engagement to promote greater student success.* The strategies listed in the Self-Study should all be explored, although we wondered whether a student club or a department online journal would be sustainable in the long run. In addition to the ideas already under consideration, the Department might think about organizing a department research event for undergraduate students or about organizing a reception or other event to coincide with student presentations at the Office for Undergraduate Research and Inquiry's Annual Undergraduate Research Symposium. Given that two of the Department faculty are affiliates of HBOI, a Strategic Pillar, the Department should also explore the potential to jointly sponsor an event that combines Environmental History and Environmental Science. The students we spoke with appreciated the opportunities they had to conduct historical research. Sharing the results of this work with other students and faculty outside the classroom in some kind of department-sponsored event might represent another opportunity to create a better sense of community among undergraduate History majors. Further, it is our understanding that FAU's Division of Student Affairs is actively seeking to support co-curricular initiatives and could provide some assistance with event planning, promotion, and refreshments.
4. *Hire new tenure-track faculty in French/Francophone History and Ancient History.* We understand the rationale behind the Department's requests for new faculty in these areas: both would fill gaps in the current coverage of geographic areas or time periods and would allow the teaching of courses popular with students. Given that these arguments have not prevailed in securing faculty lines in the recent past, we would suggest that the Department explore other rationales in their requests for new faculty lines, ones that connect with College or University

priorities if possible. For instance, while the Department's French/Francophone History position is mentioned as one that would include the histories of people from the French Caribbean, perhaps the position should be reimagined as French Empire with a specialization in the French Caribbean. And the request for this position could be aligned more intentionally with the College's Americas Initiative. The College is also planning for a cluster hire to increase the diversity of the College faculty. The Department should consider a request for a new line in Africana Studies that would help advance this College priority.

5. *Study graduation trends to determine how to increase graduation rates.* The Department now coordinates more closely with University Advising Services and the college advising office and has changed course scheduling to align with Flight Plans. The Director of Undergraduate Studies now meets individually with majors. History major graduation rates appear to fluctuate dramatically from year to year, which may not be meaningful given the fairly small number of majors. A long-term analysis of these trends will be needed, and it is expected that earlier advising access to potential majors would be helpful.

Other Recommendations

1. As part of the upcoming curriculum review, in addition to the items the Department has already planned to address (and that we commented on in the section above), the Department should also consider revising the number of total hours required for the History major. The History major is currently forty-two hours, and compared to other SUS and out-of-state peer institutions, the FAU History Department requires more hours for its major than any others in this comparison. That number would undoubtedly be on the high end were the comparison extended to additional institutions. In addition, most of the other Humanities majors in the College do not have such a high number of hours required in the major. Reducing the number of hours required for the major could attract additional students to the program and could help with the Department's ongoing effort to improve its four-year graduation rate. We would recommend that the Department consider a reduction of hours to thirty-six or fewer.
2. The Department should reconsider its involvement in the online delivery of more of its courses. We heard from faculty that past experiences with developing online classes were not positive. However, the technology and training and support resources available for online classes has improved significantly in recent years, so these courses may now offer more potential value than in previous years. Online education seems to be a state priority, and there are resources at FAU for the development of online courses. Additional online courses could potentially boost History Department enrollments and help the Department meet University retention and graduation-rate goals.
3. Since securing additional state funds will likely continue to be difficult, given current University strategic priorities, the Department should continue to look for ways to generate non-state dollars. Although the Division of Research (DOR) seems to have relatively few resources available to Humanities departments, the History Department should continue to work with the DOR to take advantage of the resources that are available and to advocate for increased support for the research enterprise of departments like History. The two faculty that are HBOI affiliates will also be eligible to apply for competitive seed funding grants from the DOR.

4. One possible revenue-producing model for the Department would be to develop a concierge-type continuing education program for local residents interested in South Florida history, culture, and/or environment. Again, HBOI might be an interesting partner in marrying the Environmental History and Marine History with Environmental Science and Marine Science in continuing education. We understood from our conversations with Associate Provost Russ Ivy that such programs can charge tuition above the in-state rate for such programs and a percentage of that additional revenue can return to the Department. Given the Department's strength in community engagement, such a program might be something the Department could develop without too much difficulty.
5. Another potential tool for student recruitment may be to offer a certificate, perhaps partnering with other areas in the college, with an emphasis on digital technologies or human rights and social justice.
6. The Department is commended for reaching out to work more closely with University Advising Services. It would be helpful for the Department and the College to continue working with University Advising Services to establish more formalized early advising pathways for access to potential History majors.