



## **The Graduate and Professional Student Senate**

### **Program Review of the Department of History**

## **Winter 2012: Catalyst Survey Results**

Submitted to the University of Washington Graduate School: March 27, 2012

*The Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS) conducts program reviews of academic departments that coincide with the Graduate School's Program Review process. GPSS reviews are a vital component of the final Graduate School Program Report. The data collected and presented by the GPSS serves as a primary source of graduate and/or professional student feedback in the Graduate School's Program Review process.*

*For most program reviews, the GPSS conducts a two-part review of the academic department that results in two separate reports. The first part is based on an electronically administered Catalyst survey requesting feedback from the graduate and/or professional students within the department being reviewed. The survey results are largely quantitative, and the results of that survey are contained within this report. The second part of the GPSS-sponsored program review involves an in-house focus group session led by GPSS senators that is dedicated to exploring further the issues raised by the Catalyst survey. This activity collects largely qualitative information. The senators take their notes from the focus group and compile the second report. The results of the focus group meeting should be reported within one to two weeks after the external review committee has visited the department.*

*For more information about the GPSS Program Review process or questions regarding this report, please contact [gpsspa@uw.edu](mailto:gpsspa@uw.edu).*

# Department of History Graduate Program Review

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## Review, Scope, and Purpose

This review *does* contain a summary of graduate student opinions and feelings regarding their department. This review *does not* seek to evaluate the department or give a general overview of the academic program. For more general and background data regarding the department, academic program, faculty, courses, and research, please see the Department of History Self-Study.

## Executive Summary of Findings

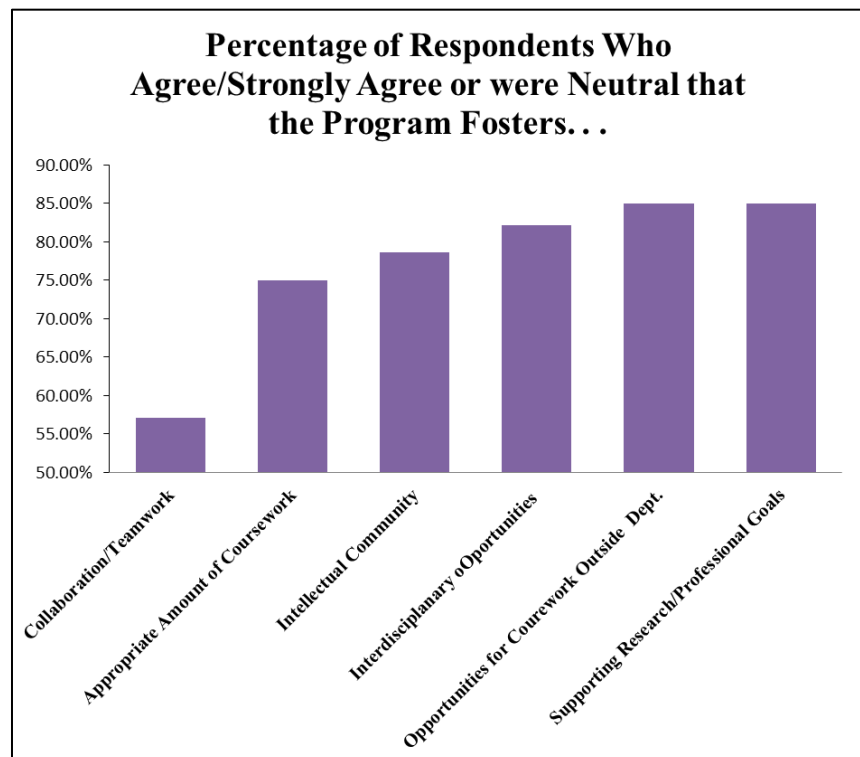
The Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS) sponsored and administered a Catalyst survey to the graduate and/or professional students in the University of Washington -Department of History between March 5 and 9, 2012. All told, 28 students responded to this survey. The responses comprised of two master's students, nine doctoral students, and 17 doctoral candidates. Of these, 25 were full-time students, one was part-time, and two were on leave. The purpose of this survey was to ensure the voices and opinions of the students within this program were included in the review process and thereby taken into account during the planning of the future direction of the program. The results of this survey are summarized within this executive summary. A copy of the survey and the summarized data are presented as appendices. The original survey data is available from the GPSS upon request, and a summary of the data is provided in this report (Appendix A).

## Executive Summary of Survey Results:

The follow sections correspond to the sections as indicated in the survey (Appendix B).

### I. Academic Program

The majority of the survey respondents (89%) considered the History Department academic standards to be very good or excellent, with another 11% noting it as "good." According to participants, the program integrates current developments in the field very well, with 78% noting it as excellent or very good.



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Additionally, the majority of respondents (93%) rated the intellectual quality of the faculty as excellent or very good.

The main area of concern for the program is the program's encouragement of collaboration and/or teamwork. More than a third of respondents (39%) disagreed that the program encouraged collaboration. It should be noted, this question gauged whether or not the program encouraged collaboration and does not answer whether or not students *wanted* to collaborate. This is noted in the comments, as one student wrote, "Some of the questions on collaboration do not apply as well to history—we receive feedback from advisors but research and writing are mostly solitary activities in our field."

Tying into this, another question asks whether program activities foster a sense of intellectual community. Just over one in five students (21%) disagreed with this statement. The last area of concern for the program is space and facilities. Only 15% of respondents considered it excellent or very good, while nearly two-thirds of respondents (63%) considered space and facilities as fair. As one student stated, "The technology provided and student lounge area is very limited."

Outside of fostering a sense of intellectual community, respondent mostly agreed or strongly agreed that the program supported research or professional goals.

## II. Research Experience

In regards to their research experience, 57% of survey respondents found their training prior to beginning on their own to be high or above average, and 36% responded that it was average. When generating the research topic, 68% of respondents found the quality of faculty guidance was high or above average, with 29% responding it was average. However, once a topic was formulated, respondents' experiences were somewhat diminished; 57% noted that their experience collaborating with faculty was high or above average, and 18% noted it was average. In regards to assistance from support or technical staff, 32% rated it as high or above average. Another 36% noted their experience was average, whereas 18% felt it was below average or low.

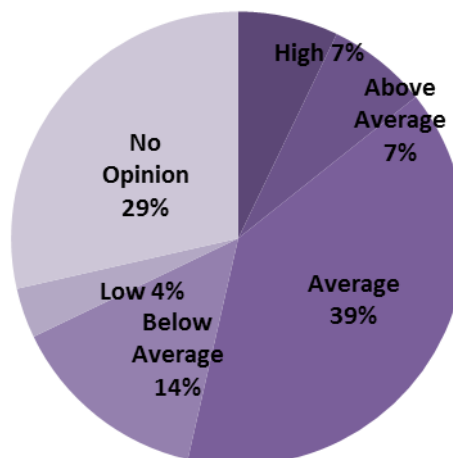
It should be noted that a significant number of respondents (14-21%) responded "no opinion" to the quality of their research experiences.

A small portion of respondents have helped with writing grant proposals (25%). A large majority have attended professional conferences (71%). Of those that did, 57% presented a paper or poster session at the conference.

## III. Career Counseling/Job Search

There's *significant room for improvement* in the department's ability to help with career counseling and job searches. Only 40% of the respondents felt they were very satisfied or satisfied with their career counseling from advisors or faculty. Twenty-two percent of the respondents were somewhat satisfied, and another 11% provided no opinion. One respondent mentioned, "Very few of our students are

Quality of Advice Received from Dept. Advisor/Faculty on How to Search for a Job



landing the jobs for which we are being prepared. The faculty discourages us from considering other options, suggesting that we stay in the program for additional years, waiting for jobs to become available.”

This is further reflected in the questions gauging the quality of advice or assistance from advisers and faculty on employment opportunities both inside and outside academia; a significant portion of respondents (29-57%) responded “below average or low.” **A significant portion** felt they had **no opinion** in how to search for a job (29%), preparing a resume or curriculum vitae (18%), and preparing for an interview (26%).

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*“The faculty discourages us from considering other options, suggesting that we stay in the program for additional years, waiting for jobs to become available.”*

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#### IV. Advising

The majority of respondents were satisfied or better (57%) with the quality of advising in the department, while just less than a quarter of respondents were somewhat satisfied (21%). However, 71% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the amount of communication with their advisors.

Of the applicable respondents, most felt that they received advice on plagiarism (95%), research (85%), written exam preparation (83%), developing a thesis/dissertation proposal (82%), and selecting a thesis/dissertation draft (79%). The percentage of respondents who received advice on preparing for oral exams (73%) and intellectual property (71%) issues was slightly lower.

From the respondents’ comments, one student mentioned how important an adviser was in their graduate experience in the department: “If you get stuck with a bad advisor (like I did), you will waste years before you finally wake up and find a different advisor. There needs to be more consistency in how we are advised in our research programs.” Additionally, students provided areas for improvement, such as “supported workshops, human subjects, and other practical research work on working in archives rather than just word of mouth from other students.”

#### V. Departmental Community

Overall, respondents had a **slightly positive opinion** of the departmental sense of community; 57% noted it was average, 21% responded it above average, and only one respondent found the sense of community high. One respondent stated, “I believe the new changes in graduate curriculum that have been made in the past two years are very good ones; and I hope that we can recruit and fund more high-quality students in the years to come. Budget cuts drastically impeded our ability to do [that].”

Respondents found the department open to diversity (82% average or higher), committed to attracting diverse students (74% average or higher), but not necessarily supportive of the needs of diverse student (59% average or higher).

The majority of the respondents either **did not know or hand no opinion** if the department had a diversity committee (86%), and a very percentage believe it does not have one (4%).

From the anecdotal comments, it should be noted that there appears to be a lack of communication between faculty and students. As one student states, “There needs to be more communication between the faculty, the graduate office, and the students.” Another student stated, “The support staff are inimical to

the program—they have arbitrary requirements that they communicate in a rude and unprofessional manner. No transparency.”

## VI. Funding

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*“Our department requires us to apply for funding every year which makes it extremely difficult to plan long term for research because you are not sure if you will have financial support year to year.”*

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A majority of the respondents (54%) expected to have no loans upon completing the program; another 14% expected to have loans less than \$9,999, another 18% would have loans between \$10,000 and \$24,999, 4% expected loans of \$25,000 to \$39,999, and 4% would have loans of \$100,000 to \$124,999.

Most (85%) of the respondents received part of their funding from teaching assistantships, with 23% receiving more than nine quarters of funding. Fifty-four percent of the respondents received their funding from a research assistantship, and 77% from a non-service fellowship. Over two-thirds of the students (68%) did not feel the department

provided sufficient funding.

In the written comments, respondents noted that departmental funding had impacted students. As one student said, “Limited funding does not allow sufficient time for research.” Another student mentioned, “Our department requires us to apply for funding every year, which makes it extremely difficult to plan long term for research because you are not sure if you will have financial support year to year.”

## VII. General Assessment

Respondents overwhelmingly (96%) have had a good, very good, or excellent experience at the University of Washington.

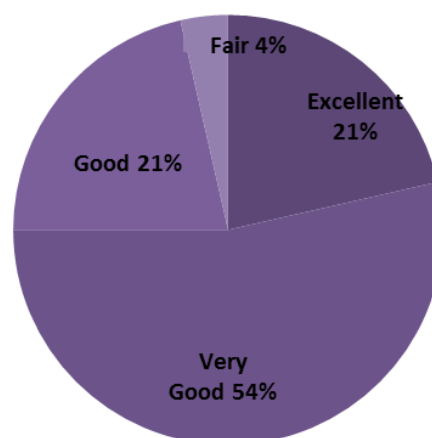
Sixty-four percent said they are **very likely to complete** their degree, whereas 32% were less optimistic responding “somewhat likely or likely” to complete. Significantly, the majority of the students (56%) responded **maybe or probably not** when asked if they would **recommend their academic program** to prospective students.

When asked about obstacles, the top three chosen by respondents were: work/financial commitments (74%), program structure and/or requirements (54%), and course scheduling (37%).

The 28 students surveyed indicated that they had applied to the following other universities or programs:

*Highest number of applications:*  
University of Wisconsin (6), University of California – Los Angeles (5), University of

Overall Quality of Academic Experience at the University of Washington



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California – Davis (3), Harvard (3), Columbia (3), University of Indiana (3), University of Michigan (2), University of Illinois (2), New York University (2), University of Minnesota, Cornell (2).

### *Other universities:*

Rice University, University of Toronto, Princeton, University of Alberta, University of Virginia, University of Hawaii, University of California – Berkeley, Stanford, University of Texas – Austin, University of California – Riverside, Georgetown, University of St. Andrews (Scotland), University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University.