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To: David Thorud
Acting Provost

From: Marsha Landolt 
Dean and Vice Provost

Re: Department of History Review

Summary and Recommended Action

At its meeting of December 5, 2002, the Graduate School Council met with members of the team reviewing the Department of History, the Chair of the Department, and the Divisional Dean for Arts and Humanities. The Council recommended continuation of the Department's undergraduate and graduate programs, with its next review to be conducted in 10 years (2012). In so doing, it congratulated the Department on the continued growth of its successful academic program. At the same time, the Council recognized the challenges confronting the Department with the imminent retirement of approximately one-quarter of its core faculty and with limited resources threatening its ability adequately to support its ambitious and high-quality curriculum.

I concur with the Council's comments and recommendations.

Background

The Department of History is among the largest departments in the University of Washington, with forty-two faculty members (eight holding joint appointments with the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies) and a further fifteen with adjunct status. The Department prides itself on the caliber of its teaching in both its undergraduate and graduate programs. It currently has over 100 graduate students, over 200 undergraduate majors and over 1,000 undergraduate minors. The Department organizes its offerings according to 12 geographical and/or epochal divisions ranging across the globe from Ancient Greece to the U.S. to Latin America and Africa. It is particularly recognized for its programs in pre-modern and modern Asia. As the study of History has evolved, methodological foci have increasingly complemented traditional geographical delineators. The Department offers two additional primary divisions that reflect this evolution, namely Comparative History and the History of Science, as well as a number of non-geographical and non-chronological sub-fields such as Colonialism, Labor and Gender. Curricular offerings and field definitions are expected to continue to shift to reflect changing faculty and professional concerns.

The review team reported that the Department is generally prospering: it has successful internal governance mechanisms, good relations with other units in the University, and has been a good steward of the resources made available to it. Department undergraduate enrollments remain strong, and although graduate applications have declined (following a national trend), the committee was impressed with the quality of graduate students and the professional success of Ph.D. graduates. The average time to completion of Ph.D.s (8.6 years) was a concern both for the review team and the Graduate School Council. The average reflects the necessity, especially among Asian area students, for extended language study. It also reflects, however, the lack of funds to support graduate students, requiring many to support themselves through academically unproductive employment.

Resource issues were the primary concern for the review team and the Graduate School Council. The two external reviewers in particular (from the University of California at Davis and Yale University), found the faculty salary levels in the Department “appalling.” This is especially true for associate professors and it has resulted in general demoralization and attempts by other institutions to hire them away. In spite of the stresses caused by their own low salaries, however, Department Chair John Findlay stressed in his remarks to the Graduate School Council that faculty members are yet more anxious for increased TA support.

The Department must also address the planned retirements of nine senior faculty members—between 20% and 25% of its tenure-track faculty—by December 2003. In contemplating the appropriate number of faculty and TAs for this department, consideration must be given to the heavy writing requirement in undergraduate history. In this regard, History, while grouped with the Social Sciences within the College of Arts and Sciences, should better be considered among the Humanities when appropriating TA positions. An adequate number of long-term TA positions will help recruit strong graduate students, which will help recruit and retain talented faculty even in spite of low salaries.

The Graduate School Council was impressed with the faculty’s strong commitment to its curriculum and students. At the same time, it encouraged the Department to look critically at its priorities in the face of limited resources. The Department must show strategically how it will place resources in the future in order to maintain overall morale and to benefit young faculty in particular.

cc: Lee Huntsman, Interim President
David Hodge, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
Susan Jeffords, Divisional Dean for Social Sciences
Debra Friedman, Associate Provost for Academic Planning
John Slattery, Associate Dean for Academic Programs
John Findlay, Chair, Department of History
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Heidi Tilghman, Assistant to the Dean