



## UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

20 November 2002

Dean Marsha Landolt  
The Graduate School  
University of Washington  
Box 353770

Dear Dean Landolt:

On behalf of my colleagues, I write in response to the report of the Ten Year Review Committee for the Department of History. We sincerely appreciate the effort and advice of the Committee. Its members proved to be thorough as well as thoughtful, and we have learned a good deal from both their observations and the productive discussions within the Department that the review process stimulated.

In this response we would like to comment on some of the Committee's remarks and discuss some of the specific recommendations made in the Committee report. Like the Committee, we will focus less on our strengths than on the problems facing the Department of History. However, we think that a few words about our strengths may provide a helpful context for understanding the Department's challenges.

The Committee report focuses on the Department's prominence in Asian history, medieval European history, and the combination of western U.S., Indian, and environmental history (not just the "Pacific Northwest"). These are indeed areas of strength, particularly at the graduate level. We wish to point out that the Department also has internationally recognized, productive scholars in several other areas and periods of study, and that in such fields as ancient Greece, modern Europe, and 20<sup>th</sup>-century U.S. these scholars have attained enviable records of graduate training and placement. We note as well that the expertise of our extraordinarily strong cohort of assistant professors—just to mention a group that the Committee singles out for praise—ranges widely over the globe and across eras. Furthermore, faculty at all ranks have played a crucial role in this University's interdepartmental culture through their contributions to interdisciplinary initiatives, teaching, scholarship, and service. Finally, by successfully moving our teaching and research in more thematic and transnational directions (e.g. comparative ethnicity and nationalism, comparative gender, comparative colonialisms, comparative labor), we are creating new strengths for the Department and the University. As a result, professors in less prominent fields (e.g. history of Africa) have become more integrated into the graduate program, and a variety of new courses at the graduate and undergraduate levels are being developed. In sum, the faculty is becoming both more interdependent and more innovative. Threats to Departmental resources, however, jeopardize these gains.

## **Resources**

We think the report identifies helpfully the key challenges we are encountering. At bottom, these challenges revolve around the resources available to us. We wish to underscore in particular the Committee's findings that the level of salaries in the Department is "appalling" and that the low number of Teaching Assistants is "disastrous."

We must add that, in the relatively short time since the Ten-Year Review was completed, the matter of resources has gotten markedly worse. University-wide budget problems and the lack of a merit raise in 2002 have only widened the gap between our salaries and those at peer institutions. Moreover, the Department is approaching a crisis in terms of faculty vacancies. When written in May of 2002, the Review Committee report noted that "as many as ten retirements can be anticipated" during the next few years. Now we know that by December of 2003 the Department will have lost nine senior faculty, none of whom we are as yet authorized to replace. During its visit, the Review Committee was told by the College that the Department "can reasonably expect that positions vacated through resignation or retirement will return" to History. Today there seems to be no basis for such an assurance. Indeed, continuing fiscal problems in the state lead one to think that matters will get worse before they get better. Other institutions, for example, continue to try to recruit History faculty away, and we have fewer resources with which to counter such efforts.

Nine vacated positions represent between 20% and 25% of the tenure-track faculty in History—an enormous loss. The one exception to the grim news was the Department's success at recruiting Professor Vicente Rafael to join it in July 2003, a significant addition to our strengths in Asian history. We appreciate the College's and University's commitment to hiring Professor Rafael.

We will work hard within the confines of the University's budget difficulties to fill the gaps created by retirements. In light of the challenges identified by the Review Committee, however, it seems crucial that the Department's existing disadvantages, especially in the allotment of Teaching Assistants, be kept in mind as the College, Graduate School, and University move forward. A healthy number of T.A. positions is crucial for maintaining the strength of our graduate program and for continuing the marked success of our undergraduate courses in teaching essential skills (writing, critical thinking) to large numbers of students.

## **Recommendations**

The Department has already begun to implement some of the Review Committee's recommendations.

- The Department has appointed a Long-Range Planning Committee to establish priorities for when (and if) we are allowed to hire new colleagues. This Committee is consulting with other units on campus, especially the Jackson School of International Studies, in order to ascertain areas of mutual need and interest.
- The Department is renewing the Chair's Advisory Committee with the aim of giving it a larger role in governance.

- The Department staff has been reconfigured by hiring a computer specialist as well as a fiscal specialist. The computer specialist has made updating the Department's web site a top priority.
- Faculty are moving to teach fewer five-day-a-week courses.
- To reduce the burdens on the Chair, a new Development Committee has been established, and the duties of the Undergraduate Studies Director have been expanded. The latter individual is now in charge of course scheduling, and is encouraging faculty to consult by region (Americanists, Europeanists, Asianists, comparativists) when planning courses for the coming year.
- In scheduling courses, approving research quarters, handling course buyouts, assigning T.A.'s, and using income from endowments and gifts, efforts are being made to make policies and processes within the Department more transparent and to facilitate the research agendas of faculty, especially at the Associate Professor level.
- Reforms to the graduate program—under discussion last year—will be finalized this year. Included among these reforms is a phased increase in multi-year funding packages to be used to recruit the top applicants to our graduate program. Our capacity to offer such packages depends largely upon our ability to increase or, at the least, keep our number of Teaching Assistant positions, which form the great bulk of resources that we can use for recruiting excellent students.
- The Department has begun discussing standards for promotion from Associate to Full Professor, and will work with the Dean and College Council to clarify them.

While many of the Review Committee's recommendations are quite helpful, two seem to us impractical at this time.

- We do not agree with the recommendation to convert one or more of the graduate student advising positions into T.A. positions. First, it is not clear that funding received for Student Advisors can simply be redirected to Teaching Assistants. Second, our Undergraduate Advising office is already scheduled to lose one of the graduate-student positions due to cuts in the Evening Degree program. Finally, the Undergraduate Advising office succeeds at a wide variety of important, often delicate tasks, and we do not regard the proposed substitutes—group advising sessions, online advising, peer consultations, and so on—as suitable alternatives.
- In better times, it may well make sense to redeploy one or more temporary lecturer positions as T.A. positions. But in light of the University's budget situation the Department cannot be confident of having a healthy leave/recapture budget to use for either T.A. positions or temporary lecturer positions. Moreover, with nine faculty members departed or departing, the need for temporary lecturers is acute because there are so many holes in our undergraduate curriculum. We can currently serve

more undergraduates, and better provide the courses that students need to complete their majors, by creating temporary lectureships aimed at specific needs in the curriculum. The recommendation to redirect leave/recapture money to T.A. positions may eventually make sense for us, but at this time it seems best to delay its implementation.

Finally, the Review Committee report urged that the University support the Department's efforts at private fund-raising. We appreciate this suggestion, and the amount of support we have received for development from the College and University. The Department has had considerable success over the years in attracting gifts from private donors, due in large part to the strength of our undergraduate teaching and the impact we have made in the community and around the state. History is redoubling efforts to reach out to its friends off campus. In particular, we are focusing our fund-raising efforts on professorships (which hold out the promise of enhancing faculty salaries, and strengthening our ability to hold on to existing faculty) and graduate support. While we take heightened development to be essential to our future, however, we also note that it takes significant amounts of time away from teaching and research—our core missions; that private gifts are not a satisfactory substitute for adequate state support; and that donors and prospective donors generally expect their gifts to supplement, not replace, substantial institutional resources for the Department.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John M. Findlay', written in a cursive style.

John M. Findlay  
Chair