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13 June 2012

Dear Deans Baldasty and Antony:

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 thoroughness and thoughtfulness that the Committee members devoted to the review process. Through our meetings with the Committee and discussion of their recommendations, we have learned a great deal and begun to imagine new ways to enhance the considerable strengths of our undergraduate and graduate programs, and to heighten the Department's reputation for excellent scholarship.

In this response, we would like to comment on some of the Committee's observations and discuss some of the specific recommendations contained in the report. As did the Committee, we will focus less on our achievements than on the challenges facing the Department of History. However, we feel that a brief overview of our key strengths will provide a useful context for discussing the Department's challenges.

We are proud that over the past ten years we have continued to increase the diversity of our Department while remaining a highly collegial and accomplished community of scholars. As the Committee's report explains, we are highly diverse both in terms of our demographics and in our research and teaching profiles. Our expertise spans the globe – from the Pacific Northwest and the United States to Asia, Europe, Latin America, and Africa – and extends across human history, from ancient and medieval times through to the late twentieth century. We are first-rate scholars who regularly win prestigious research fellowships and prizes for the books and articles that we publish. We are also excellent teachers. Our faculty has won the Distinguished Teaching Award more times than faculty in any other unit on campus. Moreover, graduating seniors express strong levels of satisfaction with our major while our graduate students also rank their overall experiences quite highly. Finally, History faculty members are outstanding citizens of the University and the publics that extend beyond it. We play pivotal roles in a wide range of units across campus including the Comparative History of Ideas program, the Walter C. Simpson Center for the Humanities, the Program on the Environment, and programs housed within the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, and in university administration, faculty governance, and various diversity initiatives. Moreover, we contribute to broader learning communities through the Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest and the Harry Bridges

Center for Labor Studies, and through on-line initiatives like BlackPast.com and the Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project.

Resources

Not surprising in the wake of recent budget cuts and salary and hiring freezes, we view resources as our most pressing challenge. And no resource issue is felt more acutely in the Department than low stipend and salary levels among graduate students, faculty, and staff. While the new union contract promises to increase graduate student stipends and wages starting in 2013-14, similar measures need to be taken to address the salary concerns of faculty and staff. Without such measures, we anticipate losing more faculty to higher-paying institutions and highly skilled staff to other units and organizations. Many salaries are so compressed that beyond the return of annual raises we now likely need some kind of unit salary adjustment to bring our levels of compensation in line with those of colleagues at peer institutions.

We currently see the need for new faculty positions in somewhat more expansive and urgent terms than did the Committee in its report submitted last month. Whereas it recommended that we be authorized to conduct two or more searches over the next two years, we sincerely believe that to avoid undermining the quality of our undergraduate curriculum, the vitality of our graduate program, and research synergies among our faculty, we need to hire five or more excellent faculty in the next couple of years.

Between 2007 and two weeks ago, we have lost eight faculty and, so far, have not been authorized to conduct searches for new hires in these fields: modern China (Tani Barlow); U.S. Civil War (Tracy McKenzie); twentieth-century U.S. (Nikhil Singh); pre-modern Islam (Florian Schwarz); modern Germany (Uta Poiger); pre-modern Japan (David Spafford); modern Middle East (Shaun Lopez); and early modern European history of science and technology (Simon Werrett). Moreover, over the next few years, the Department expects to experience three to six retirements in fields of notable strength including Asian, ancient European, and U.S. history. As the Committee's report describes, these departures and impending retirements have pushed faculty concerns about the Department's future near a tipping point. When the Committee finished its work in April, the sense was that one more departure would be critical, and since then Shaun Lopez and Simon Werrett have announced their resignations. We recently submitted a detailed hiring plan to Judith Howard, Divisional Dean of Social Sciences, explaining our immediate needs in modern Middle East, Islam before 1900, modern Germany, Japan, and the United States in the World.

The Committee encouraged us not to think of new hires in terms of filling "particular chronological and geographical hole[s]" but in terms of plugging "into wider thematic networks on campus." We believe that when determining hiring priorities and making appointment decisions, we have long balanced the demands of our undergraduate curriculum and graduate program with the Department's commitment to forms of comparative, transnational, and world history that speak to inter-disciplinary concerns. Over the past twenty years, this broadminded approach has enabled us to build significant strength in the areas of gender history, labor history, comparative colonialisms, critical race studies, and the history of science, medicine, and technology – all areas that have contributed to intellectual conversations and programmatic

developments across campus. Moreover, we have often developed our hiring priorities in concert with the area studies programs in the Jackson School. Such coordination has enhanced the global reach of both units and supported a diverse range of concentrations, minors, and majors for undergraduate students, and enhanced funding and supervisory opportunities for graduate students.

At a few points in the report, the Committee seemed to express surprise or even concern that such a large portion of the Department's recent undergraduate enrollments stem from courses in the fields of ancient, medieval, and early modern history. This fact is not an aberration but rather a long-standing pattern in our Department and in history departments across the country: courses on the more distant past are very popular with students and play a vital role in a liberal arts education. In the face of departures and approaches retirements, we are committed to rebuilding and maintaining our excellence in pre-modern history. As with all new appointments, our approach will be to hire talented scholars whose teaching engages a broad range of students and whose research complements and connects with other faculty in the Department and beyond – in units potentially ranging from Art History and Classics to the School of Law and Near Eastern Languages and Civilization.

Another pressing resource issue for the Department is graduate funding. We heartily agree with the Committee's recommendation that the College "provide a more consistent and predictable funding source for graduate students." For the past few years, news about temporary instructional monies has arrived too late to inform our decisions about graduate admissions. Such late notification has also affected the morale of some of our continuing graduate students who only learn, after the school year has begun, whether or not they have funding for all three quarters. To strengthen our graduate program, we need instructional monies that are currently temporary to be made permanent. Moreover, to put together recruitment packages that are competitive with those offered by our peer institutions, we need to secure more fellowships from the Graduate School or College. Like so many other strong departments at UW, each year we lose promising recruits to other programs not because they prefer to work with faculty elsewhere but because our packages cannot compete.

As the Committee's report describes, the Department of History has had tremendous success over the past decade with private fundraising. Newly established professorships and faculty fellowships have been used to retain faculty who have had outside offers and to reward others for outstanding teaching and scholarship. Other gifts have created undergraduate scholarships and a small number of graduate fellowships, and provided faculty with research funds. Our fundraising success has indeed eased some of the financial strains of the past few years. Nonetheless, it is not realistic to expect private donations to remedy the systemic resource problems of low faculty and staff salaries, the need for new hires, and the instability and inadequacy of graduate funding. To fix these problems, solutions must be found within the University.

Responses to Other Recommendations

The Department has already implemented two of the Committee's recommendations:

- We offered Charity Urbanski, who was hired a few years ago to teach some of Robert Stacey's medieval European history courses while he served in the Dean's Office, a three-year contract as a full-time lecturer and she has accepted it. Dr. Urbanski has proven to be an excellent undergraduate teacher and this arrangement rightly provides her with greater job security. We are grateful for the financial support from the College that made this possible.
- Also with financial support from the College, we have hired, for the next academic year, a History graduate student on a ten-month Graduate Student Assistant (GSA) appointment to assist Matt Erickson, our very effective but greatly overworked undergraduate advisor. Over the next year as we seek to reflect on and rationalize our staff organization (see below), we will decide whether it makes sense to stay with a GSA in this position or to hire a second professional staff member to work in undergraduate advising.

We are in the process of implementing a number of the Committee's other constructive recommendations:

- The Committee recommended that the new Chair undertake a reorganization of the staff that would both remedy misalignments of staff positions and workloads, and delineate more clearly any new responsibilities and performance benchmarks. As incoming Chair, I plan to undertake such a review, possibly in collaboration with a consultant recommended by the Dean's Office.
- Over the past few years, History faculty members have felt pressure to increase our student to teaching assistant (TA) ratios. Although faculty did their best to respond to this challenge, the inevitable decrease in the attention paid to writing because of increasing student to TA ratios has harmed morale as many faculty feel that they have seriously compromised the quality of their instruction. The Committee's discussion of these instructional and morale issues has resulted in the Dean's Office granting the Department greater flexibility on such ratios. In the new era of Activity-Based Budgeting (ABB), History faculty members understand that student numbers are crucially important. Greater flexibility, however, will allow us to think in more diverse ways about how we use TAs rather than imposing the same minimum student to TA ratio for all courses. In autumn quarter, our Undergraduate Studies Committee will facilitate a department-wide conversation on how faculty might best maintain or increase the total number of students we teach while preserving or restoring a strong focus on writing in most, if not all, courses. This committee plans to issue new guidelines for curriculum planning and TA assignments before faculty need to submit their 2013-14 teaching plans. Such guidelines will hopefully also lessen lingering concerns, mentioned in the Committee's report, about a lack of transparency in the assignment of TAs.
- We see our strong reputation for collegiality as less of a problem than did the Committee. Yet, many faculty agree with the Committee's observation that the Department would benefit from better communication among and between faculty, staff, and graduate students, and the development of a more robust intellectual community. To these ends,

we plan to undertake a number of initiatives. First, we will relaunch a regular department research colloquium in which faculty and graduate students present works-in-progress. Second, we plan to hold a one-day faculty retreat (in the Smith Room of Suzzallo Library) the week before classes start in September. The purpose of the retreat will be to provide more time and a more relaxed atmosphere than our regular departmental meetings to discuss issues of undergraduate curriculum planning and TA use (mentioned above), and to brainstorm about how we might better mentor our graduate students, especially with an eye to preparing them for the non-academic job market (see below). Third, in response to the Committee's observation that some associate professors expressed anxiety about the next stage of promotion to full professor, I will work with the Department's Associate Professors' Review Committee to communicate more fully the requirements for that promotion, and provide increased mentorship to assist associate professors in attaining it. Finally, as part of my review of staff organization, I will facilitate discussions between various members of the Department about how to improve overall communication between staff, faculty, and students.

- Both the Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS) survey and the Committee's report highlighted significant concerns among graduate students regarding intellectual community, advising and mentoring, and funding. Some of our plans to address these concerns have already been outlined above. In addition, Glennys Young, as Director of Graduate Studies, has undertaken several initiatives. First, last week, she held a meeting to help graduate students form reading and writing groups. Second, Professor Young plans to work with the Graduate Liaison Committee (GLC) to organize an annual Department of History graduate student/faculty conference, beginning next year. Third, the Department's Graduate Studies Committee has issued a recommendation that Ph.D. students who have passed their exams meet with their entire reading committee at least once per year to discuss progress on their dissertations. Fourth, Professor Young has begun discussions with some faculty about how the Department might better prepare our graduate students for non-academic employment opportunities. For many years, our graduate program has had quite a distinguished placement record. Since the recent downturn in the academic job market, however, things have become less certain. We thus feel an increasing responsibility to provide our graduate students with training commensurate with a wider range of employment possibilities. In hiring new faculty, we plan to pay close attention to candidates who, in addition to more traditional forms of instruction and advising, could share expertise in the realms of public history and the digital humanities. And finally, Professor Young plans to communicate more frequently and directly with graduate students about programmatic issues, particularly funding procedures and possibilities.
- The Committee recommended that we enhance our website, especially as regards the listing of faculty specializations, and develop a more comprehensive system for tracking current and past graduate students. Over the summer, I will consult with staff, the Associate Chair, the Director of Graduate Studies, and the Director of Undergraduate Studies about the best way to implement these recommendations as well as some other updates to our web presence.

Again, we deeply appreciate the considerable time and thought that the Committee devoted to reviewing our Department. They perceptively highlighted many of our strengths and challenges, and offered some very useful recommendations – regarding both resources and departmental culture – for enhancing our accomplishments in the next decade.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lynn M. Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lynn M. Thomas
Professor and Incoming Chair